

白鳥士郎

shirow shiratori

illustration:shirabi supervisor:saiyuki

監修 ■ 西遊棋
イラスト ■ しらび



Ryuoh no Oshigoto! - Volume 01

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ryuoh no oshigoto!

のりゅうおうのおしごと!

白鳥士郎
イラスト ■ しらび
監修 ■ 西遊棋



ひな つる
雛鶴あい

八一に憧れ、弟子になるため
押しかけて来た小学三年生。

く ず りゅう や いち
九頭竜八一

現竜王の16歳。タイトル奪
取後調子を落とし連敗中。

そら ぎん こ
空 銀子

八一の姉弟子。女流二冠。

きよ たき けい か
清滝桂香

八一の師匠の娘。憧れの人。



シャルロット・
イゾアール

フランス人学校に通う6歳
児。かわいい。

さだ どう あや の
貞任綾乃

お嬢様っぽいしっかりも
の。小学三年生。

みず こし みお
水越澪

活発でスポーティな小学
三年生。

メンバー全員女子小学生な
この研究会は『J.S.研』ってところか。
神話になるな……



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| イラスト | しらび | 総ページ数 | 312ページ | | |
| | | 発行所 | SBクリエイティブ | | |
| 監修 | 西遊棋 | 発行年月日 | 2015年9月30日 | | |
| | | ページ数 | □ | | ページ数 |
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Prologue

“Master’s OO...is so hard...”

Three months after I, 16 years old, became the Ryuuou, I had an elementary school girl as my first disciple. Due to various reasons, we’re living together.

“Hooo...it’s really hard...”

The nine-year-old disciple is seated before me, the round cheeks dyed a sakura pink, bringing her cheeks to the master’s Ou, moaning like a puppy.

She’s a cute, angelic girl.

Faced with such purity, innocence of a girl who could be considered a really young girl, my stiff self-caused me to feel really guilty, but I had no intention to back off.

This stubbornness is basically violence.

“Nn...”

My first disciple—Ai Hinatsuru, lets out a warm breath, showing the deepest part of her before me, luring me in. She proceeds with a bold technique that was atypical of an elementary school kid.

But this action is really...

“...Is this okay? Ai?”

I see my young disciple make this decision, and ask her again.

Ai—

“...”

Nods silently, shivering a little...

A little tentative, I finally make up my mind to accept that invitation.

“Here I go...”

“Y-yes...!”

I reach out towards the deepest part of my disciple’s zone.

And right when my fingers are about to touch there— “Ah! Th-this is no good after all!!”

Ai shouted, her body quivering on its own.

She’s rather flustered as she let me reach into an unexpected place. That reaction makes me feel good.

“Master, that...wait...”

“No can do.”

I coldly stop her. I can’t wait for this kind of thing.

“There’s no such thing as ‘wait’ in professional Shogi.”

“Hii...!” Ai gives me a look of someone on the verge of tears.

It’s no wonder she’s showing such a reaction when she let me fork on both the O-Sho and the Rook at the same time.

April, in Osaka.

It was the season where the Sakuras have already bloomed In Osaka Park, and started to scatter. Whenever the warm Spring winds blow, countless petals flutter onto the ground like snow.

The visitors viewing the flowers around us look surprised, “...What are they doing?”

“...Shogi? At this place?”

“That cute little girl’s able to play Shogi too...”

“Anyway, did they bring that all the way here? That chessboard looks very heavy...”

“Hey, isn’t that the pro player Yaichi Kuzuryuu?”

Some Shogi fans have realized my identity, and aim their cellphones at me.

Ai and I are under the most magnificent Sakura Tree at the Nishinomaru Garden. We came here early to book our spot and play Shogi, so Ai’s fluttering

hair has some Sakura petals on.

I sweep away the petals that have landed on the chessboard, and point at the chess clock at the side of the chessboard, prompting my disciple to take action.

“Hey, time’s going to run out if you don’t hurry, you know?”

“Uumuuuuu...!”

And then she continues to attack hard in a manner different from a typical elementary school kid, but unable to withstand the attacks of the Ryuuou as she was in an overwhelming disadvantage, and could only admit defeat.^[1]

“...I lost.”

She looks really regretful, saying that.

And then, she points at my King and the many defensive pieces around it.

“You’re too much, Master! Really cruel! How am I supposed to attack when you defend the king so much?”

“Didn’t I tell you? You’re not gonna beat me if we’re playing on equal terms.”

It’s to be expected that an elementary school kid will lose badly against a pro who doesn’t play with any handicap.

But in any case, this girl isn’t an ordinary elementary school girl.

It’s because I’ve seen her talent that I’m able to sit here and go all out against her, and have her as my disciple. This girl has the most important talent for a Shogi player.

That talent is—

“Again! Let’s play again!!”

“Again? How many dozens of rounds has it been again...?”

We’ve been playing since early in the morning, and she’s still not satisfied, but I can’t say that I don’t empathize with her.

A Shogi player is one who does not sing a song after stepping into a karaoke box, but would bring Shogi pieces and the chessboard in for a few rounds. I’m one of those.

I remember, back when I was at the beach, the Shogi pieces were washed away by the sea. When climbing up the hill, I had a quick match, and due to air thinness, I got giddy...

“Anyway, anedeshi and Haika-san sure are late, aren’t they? Mio-chan and the others...”

“Yeah. Ah, since they aren’t here yet, why don’t we continue playing while waiting? ‘kay? ‘kay?”

Hearing those words, I had a thought.

“Ai, you...told them that we’re watching the flowers today, right?”

“I did though?”^[2]

“You didn’t, right?”

“I did! Just that...I told them that it’s a little later.”

“Hey!!?”

“it’s okay. Everyone will be here 4 hours later.”

4 hours?

“So that means we’re starting at night!? Why did you do this?”

“B-but...”

Ai lowers her eyes, bites her lips, and utters, “...I want to play lots of rounds with you, Shogi rounds...”

“Ugh...!!”

That’s illegal. I thought.

In this vast Osaka Park, this adorable girl capable of getting everyone’s attention start to have tears in her large eyes, pleading for me to play shogi with her.

And seated in front of me is my first disciple—my best disciple.

This is impossible! I can’t help but pamper her, it’s impossible!!

“...10 minutes of timer, and once time runs out, 30 seconds.”

“Okaay!! I love you, master ≡”

“Okay okay.”

My heart skip a beat after she says this so honestly, but I immediately remind myself that she’s an elementary school girl, and I’m not a lolicon. But she’s cute. Ugh...

I feel startled at how much I can’t help but pamper my disciple as I rearrange the Shogi pieces like I’m playing catch, letting out crisp sounds on the board.

There’s a little girl seated before the thick Shogi board.

On a certain day, this angelic girl suddenly appeared before me, and saved me.

What saved me was her innocence. And her ‘love for Shogi’.

“Please take care of me!”

Ai finishes arranging, straightens herself, and sits in a Seiza, bows towards me, her forehead nearly touching the board.

We bow to each other, lift our heads, and her little hand dancing on the board like fluttering Sakura petals, looking as though she’s anxious to pick up a piece.

“...Nn!”

With a flick of her fingertips, followed by a high-pitched clicking sound, Ai makes a move on the board. All the visitors here to look at the Sakuras see the movement that’s prettier and more fleeting than the flowers, and can’t help but marvel in unison.

And so, Ai raises herself slightly, reaching her petite body as best as she can, and taps the switch of the chess clock by the side.

It’s my turn.

As I look at the clock that begins to tick, I suddenly recall.

The day I first met Ai—the day the duo’s chess clock started to move.

第

譜

棋士紹介

◎ 九頭竜 ハー(くずりゅう やいち) 竜王

- 棋士番号
- 生年月日
- 出身地
- 師匠
- 竜王戦
- 順位戦
- 昇段履歴

333

2000年8月1日

福井県大野市

清滝鋼介九段

第29期竜王(1組以上-1期)

C級2組

2009年9月 6級

2015年10月1日 四段

2016年9月8日 七段

2016年12月25日 八段



Yaichi Kuzuryu

■ タイトル履歴

| | |
|--------|-----------------|
| 竜王 | 1期(第29期-2016年度) |
| 登場回数合計 | 1回 竜王:1回 |
| 獲得合計 | 1期 |

1st Score

Kuzu's Repayment^[3]

"I wanna peeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!!"

The man's voice echoed down Naniwasuji.

It's Osaka, at a strange building with the words 'Shogi Association' written on the wall.

At the 5th floor, a man poked his head out of the window, undid his belt, and pulled his trousers down to his knees, showing his stripe trunks as he yelled to the outside.

I wanna pee! I wanna pee!!

"Kiyotaki-sensei! It's too dangerous, come down!"

"Aren't you a 9th Dan grandmaster!? You're 50 years old, and you act like this!?"

"I wanna pee!! I wanna peeeeeeeeeeee!!!"

The staff of the Kansai Branch of the Shogi Association and the fellow pro players swarmed in, intending to stop him. But this man, 9th Dan Kousuke Kiyotaki could not be stopped, and was further agitated.

Downstairs, there were salarymen and office ladies passing by, wondering, "He's intending to jump down?", "Eh, he's showing his underwear!?", and they all started taking out their cellphones, intending to take photos.

"Master!! Stop with the stupid thing!"

I, Yaichi Kuzu, grabbed the waist of Master Kiyotaki, clinging onto him for dear life with the risk of falling down from the building.

“Let go of me, Yaichi!! I... I wanna peepee heeeeeeeeerrrrreeeeeeeee!!”

Master showed his underwear as he grabbed the window sill, yelling,

“PEEE!!!!”

Why in the world did my master go crazy?

Why would a 50-year-old man do such a barbaric thing to ‘pee from the window of his workplace’?

It all started a few hours ago—

That day, I was playing a ceremonial match against my Master at this Kansai Shogi Association.

It’s a match between ‘Master and disciple’.

The first time the disciple challenged his master after becoming a pro.

“I hope to ‘repay’ Master by showing him the growth I have attained.”

I told the reporters before our match.

Two years ago, in October, I became a professional Shogi player at the age of 15, and the 4th ‘Middle School Player’ in history, and the owner of the title of the youngest champion ever, attaining the attention of the world of Shogi.

9th Dan Master Kiyotaki never obtained the title, but he was a veteran who managed to challenge a Meijin twice.

Steady in his moves, he aggressively seeks victory, and is a heavyweight in the world of Kansai Shogi.

“My disciple will be my opponent, but is the title owner. I shall take on this match in a humble manner. I’m hoping to release my younger self and have a free-flowing game of Shogi.”

Master, sitting on the lower seat, smirked at me as he said this. He was dressed in a new suit, and oozing with fighting spirit.

Before our match, we shook hands as per the reporters’ request. In this

serious and yet warmly atmosphere, the first match between Master and Disciple began—

And then, not only did Master release his younger self, he released his lower body, intending to scatter sacred holy water on the Mecca of the Kansai Shogi world.

“Peeeeeeeeeeeeee!!!!”

““Don’t do itttttttttt!!!””

Everyone of the Kansai Shogi Association went on to stop him from peeing.

Ah, as for the match, I won.

In the world of Shogi, a disciple beating the Master is called ‘repaying gratitude’.

“I’m able to get this strong. It is all thanks to your teachings.”

This is not conveyed through words, but through winning a Shogi match.

But even though the opponent was his beloved disciple, Master was definitely pissed about losing. This is Shogi.

Several years ago, he could easily beat me even with a few handicaps, and treated me as a son despite being the opponent, but now, without any handicaps, playing on equal terms, he still got completely walloped.

This clearly practically signaled the death of a player, and a lot more to lament than an ordinary loss.

“Don’t pee here just because of that, Master!”

“Peeeeeeeeeeeeee!!! I wanna peeeeeeeee!!!!!”

My Master (50 years old) was throwing a tantrum like a kid at a toy shop. He really hated losing way too much.

The reporters gathered here were logically hoping to see some heartwarming scenes like “You got stronger, Yaichi.” “M-Master!”, but it ended up as a huge pissing photo contest. There’s no way this can be reported.

To be honest, I was disappointed too.

I didn't expect to obtain Master's praise, but I hoped that he could at least show some dignity as a Shogi player, and give a respectable look.

However, the reality was a complete opposite, that he was pissing in front of everyone.

Master smashed his Shogi pieces on the board, and admitted defeat in the worst possible manner, unable to say anything as he was displeased. He looked down, and was shaking. He was frustrated, really frustrated, he was shaking.

I too didn't know what to say due to the awkwardness. "Ahh...I missed up!" I had such a feeling as I sat down.

Normally, this was the moment where we should analyze the prior match, but the mood clearly showed that it was not the time, and the reporters looked down silently as though a wake was going on.

15 minutes, and Master continued shaking, not making a sound.

And then, he slowly got to his feet, dashing to the window, and shouted, "Pee!!!!!!!"

"Shut uppppppppppppppppppppppppppppp!!!"

I had enough! I'm at my limit!

I didn't want to do this against Master...but I decided to move out of my position.

"As 'Ryuuou', I command you!! Go to the toilet like a proper adult!!"

"...!!"

Master shivered, and his hands, about to remove his underwear, stopped.

Starting and ending a match with courtesy is an important tradition and etiquette of a mental match.

I, as the disciple, sat on the upper seat on this day, and even between elders and masters, they have to show respect to the one 'ranked higher'. This goes especially for the Ryuuou, on par with the Meijin in Shogi, one of the 7 titles.

“Master, no, 9th Dan Kiyotaki. Put on your trousers.”

“.....Kuzu Ryuuou.”^[4]

“Ah?”

“What Ryuuou are you, you scum? You’re just scum! You’re just a scumbag Ryuuou who just chanced upon the title!”

Th-this old man... saying all that...!

“I’m not **Kuzu** Ryuuou, I’m the Ryuuou **Kuzuryuu** ! Didn’t you just lose that match anyway, right?”

“This is just a match arranged by the magazine! It’s not an official match, it doesn’t count!”

“This is a match arranged by the world’s number 1 selling magazine Shogi World! It bears the same weight as an official match!!”

“But the other magazines are just the ‘NHK Shogi Seminar’ and the ‘Tsumeshogi Paradise’!”^[5]

“Number 1 in the world means number 1 in the world! Don’t underestimate the 200,000 copies released!”

‘Shogi World’, a magazine that allows both Pros and Amateurs to properly understand the world of Shogi.

“You could have said that you hate losing to your disciple! Enough with all those excuses!”

“I hate this!!! I lost to a Scum Ryuuou who has a 30% win rate!!!”

“Say that again, you shitty old man!!”

“I’ll say that as many times as you want scumbag scumbag scumbag scumbag scumbag scumbag scumbag scumbag scumbag scumbag!!”

“I’m quitting! I’m quitting from being your disciple!”

We’re no longer master and disciple! I want to beat this old man up! And then I’m going to get him to the toilet.

At this moment.

“Yaichi.”

“Ah! Anedeshi!!”^[6]

The girl who was as pretty as silvery white snow wordlessly stood behind me, dressed in a sailor uniform.

Ginko Sora.

She was my senior disciple, and though she’s younger than me, I still have to call her ‘big sister’. She’s the first disciple under Kiyotaki.

“Andeshi! C-cover that! Get something to cover Master’s thing!!”

“Here.”

“As to be expected of you, anedeshi! You came prepared—”

I saw the thing I had in my hand, and froze up.

She gave me the lid of the pieces’ box.

It’s too small! This is way too small!!”

“It can be used to contain the Kin and the Gyoku though?”^[7]

“You just wanted to say dirty jokes, didn’t you!?”

This woman (Amateur) could have brought a cushion over instead. What’s with the double entendre at this moment!

“Anedeshi! This isn’t the time for jokes!? Please think of a way to settle this problem!!”

“You can urinate right now too, Yaichi?”

“Me!? Why?”

“That’ll be a great talking point between you and Master.”

“Of course not!”

While Anedeshi and I continued with our Manzai routine as we traded barbs back and forth, Master took the opportunity to pull his trousers down.

“Peeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!!!”

And he started peeing while the yells occurred.

“Woah!” “He peed!”

The veteran players watching from a safe distance away exclaimed and cheered on for some strange reason. Stop him! Stop cheering him and stop him!”

“Master! Cover that filthy thing first! Masteeerrrr!!”

“Peeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!!”

“Watch out! Get away!”

“Kyaaaaa!! It got on my face! My face!!”

I screamed, followed by master moving around like an animal, followed by the screams of the onlookers outside the building, causing massive chaos on Naniwasuji in the afternoon.

Crumples on the pants

Later on, Master's daughter came to the Shogi Association, and finally managed to get Master to put on his underwear, put him into the taxi, and dragged him off home.

"He finally went back."

"...I guess."

Both anedeshi and I watched the taxi leave.

Right when I finally relaxed, and talked to the Chess Association staff who came running over to me, looking guilty "Sorry to bother you, Kuzuryuu-sensei, Sora-sensei. We will handle the rest..."

"No, we shall handle this ourselves."

Anedeshi declared. There was still the dirty work of cleaning up the urine.

"B-but...how can we allow both of you to do this."

"The humiliation of the master is to be carried by his disciples."

"But..."

This staff member still would not answer, but it appeared there was other matters later that caused him to agree to anedeshi and me cleaning up, and he returned to the Shogi Association. The Shogi World sure was busy on this day.

Anedeshi took out a mop and pail from the staff, and shoved it to her junior.

In other words, me.

"Why only me?"

"Allocation of responsibilities. I'll apologize to the victims."

"Ah, better let the title holder handle the public--"

"I do have a title too."

Well, anedeshi does have a title, two of them actually. Damn it...!

The skirt of anedeshi's uniform flipped, and she turned her back on me.

"Sorry to cause all the passers-by trouble. If you are hurt in any way, please contact the Kansai Branch of the Shogi Association—"

Anedeshi bowed once she said that, and the passers-by started to chatter,

"Huh? Aren't...ar-are you the 'Snow White of Naniwa'!?"



“...”

“I saw you on TV before! Please sign an autograph!”

Anedeshi was instantly surrounded by the crowd. Sure, she is popular.

“Kyaa! So cute!” “Snow White’s really white!” the girls seem to like her a lot too. I say, you guys, the Ryuuou is here too, you know? I removed my glasses, trying to emphasize this to everyone, but none of them noticed.

‘Snow White of Naniwa’ is the nickname given to anedeshi.

I didn’t know whether the nickname started from a Shogi magazine or somewhere else, but it started gaining popularity about a year ago when she had a TV interview. I did become famous for a while as a pro player in Middle School and the youngest Ryuuou in history, but anedeshi’s fame was way up there, and I’m completely under her shadow. Damn it...!

Just to note, anedeshi herself doesn’t like this nickname.

At this place, in Osaka, the nickname ‘Snow White of Naniwa’ is more pronounced than ‘the Rocky of Naniwa’ or ‘Mozart of Naniwa’, and she, currently a middle school student, rejected it, saying, “I don’t need such a nickname.” It does sound like she really hated it.

Speaking of which, this was really a frivolous thing to be bothered over.

In the world of Shogi, nicknames are a proof of popularity and ability. Only those really famous Shogi players can get their nicknames, and these nicknames are really awe-inspiring, like ‘the man able to read 100 million and three moves in a second’, ‘the engine of the playing board’, ‘the end game magician’, ‘the youth preserver’, ‘the offensive Yamato Nadeshiko’, the ‘Fork Monk’, ‘the Ruling Evangelist’, ‘the Woodchopper Daigorou’. Maybe some might think the last one ‘Woodchopper Daigorou’ has nothing to do with Shogi, but woodchopping, but that’s a different matter altogether. Well, anything goes as long as the Shogi fans are pumped up.

“Haa... this is troublesome.”

The last-minute autograph meeting ended, and anedeshi opened her umbrella, and sighed.

“Such troublesome matters just increase after winning some titles, how troublesome...”

“Such a frivolous bother huh, Princess.”

“Don’t call me that, or I’ll kill you.”

Anedeshi’s title is limited to females in the ‘Female Chess Tourney’. There are 6 titles in all, and the ‘Queen’ and ‘Ladies Champion’ titles belong to her. She’s a Princess, and yet she has the title of a Queen (LOL).

Given anedeshi’s ability, it’s not a dream for her to dominate all the titles, but given the standings, it was impossible. As for the reason, it shall be mentioned, so please look forward to it.

“Yaichi, what are you slacking around for? Hurry up and clean up the place!”

“But Master really spread the urine so far away...”

“In Shogi, we move our hands, and not our mouth.”

Yes, yes... I move the mop enthusiastically.

“Goodness, that peeing Master...! It’s all over the place! Did he pass out dozens of liters or something?”

“Can’t be helped. He drank a lot during the match.”

It’s said that when the mind’s moving at full speed, it craves for sweets, but when playing Shogi, we subconsciously desire more of something else.

That’ll be water.

Some players bring along 5 or so PET bottles of 2 liters, and especially at end games, some players take a cup of water for every move, so they often needed to head to the toilet.

For a player, fighting against the urge to pee is a very serious situation, and in fact, it’s likely that some end up losing in an embarrassing manner of running out of time because they kept going to the toilet. Why did I keep talking about peeing?

“In Go matches, they have toilet breaks; I really wish the Shogi world can incorporate that too.”

“Getting warm...”

“Eh? Warm, anedeshi, what do you do if you want to go to the toilet?”

“Just pee out.”

“...?”

“Peeing out isn’t much compared to losing, isn’t it?”

Is she for real?

“Shogi is a battle with lives on the line. It is strange for anyone to be worried about urinating during the battle.”

“You’re just like Master, anedeshi.”

“I’ll kill you.”

But she’s really worthy of respect. She’s like a Feudal Lord during the Sengoku Era; no wonder she’s able to dominate the women’s Shogi landscape.

By the time anedeshi said that cleaning was done, the sun was already setting, the color of sunset shining on the ground. The slow trip of pee finally ended, and I didn’t feel lonely at all.

“Yaichi.”

I was about to bring the pail and mop back, but anedeshi called for me—grabbing my neck with her hands.

“Here’s... a prize for you.”

“Eh!? A-a prize, anedeshi... wh-what—”

“Okay, here.”

Anedeshi draped something hard on my neck. It’s Master’s trousers.

“I don’t need such a thing!! What can I do with it anyway!?”

“Smell it?”

“For what!? Only a pervert will bring the trousers home to sniff!”

“It can be used as some good memorabilia.”

“Memorabilia what!? You want me to look at these trousers and remember

the nightmare today!?”

“The knees.”

Hearing that, I was shocked, and opened Master’s pants.

Only the right knee was crumpled, but not the left.

“Even if one did think of a good move, you can’t play it immediately, and to withstand that urge, you’ll pinch the trousers hard. Normally, a player’s pants will only be crumpled at the knee of the strong-arm side...right?”

Anedeshi said, and I looked at my knees. Like Master’s trousers, only one side had lots of crumples.

A Shogi player’s instincts are right 70% of the time, and the first move thought of is typically the best one. However, during the other 30%, there are often dangers lying in wait. Moves that one may think ‘brilliant’ and made without further thought would be the worst of them all, and there are many instances of losing because of this step.

Thus, there was a need to endure, to take action immediately, the pinch the knees, and ponder.

The crumples on the trousers showed that Master never relaxed one bit in his match against me, and he played seriously against his disciple; this was the decisive proof.

“...We often crumple our pants too.”

“...I guess.”

“We imitated Master, and crumpled the right knee of the pants even when we aren’t playing.”

“And we ruined our pants and got scolded.”

I guess even if it was a figure of speech, I hoped to recall the times when I was younger; we grimaced at each other.

Anedeshi covered her face with the umbrella, and told me,

“...Master must have been happy to play against you, Yaichi, and he might have prepared for this a long time back...to play it as seriously as an official

match, to be enthusiastic, and go all out. So—”

“...Right, I know.”

I nodded, holding onto Master’s trousers. I saw the crumples on the trousers, and understood what mentality Master had as he battled me, and what mood he was in.

A bout of holy water was sprayed upon the Mecca of Shogi on this day.

But that might be the fiery tears from Master...

Kuzu Ryuuou

“I’m going back. As for that filthy... Master’s important trousers, you can bring them home, Yaichi.”

“You wanted to say filthy thing, right!? You thought of Master’s important trousers as something dirty, right?”

“I didn’t.”

“What did you want to say in the first place?”

“Ob...rigada.”^[8]

Portuguese?

“I guess we should just play rock paper scissors to decide who brings these trousers back? Leaving aside the crumple on the knee, there’s some strange stain on the crotch—”

“Yaichi. You free tomorrow?”

“Eh...? Ehh, yeah. I got a match two days later, so nothing for tomorrow.”

“Then I’ll play a match at your house, Yaichi.”

‘VS’ refers to a one on one practice match. It appeared anedeshi had decided to completely ignore the matter about the pants.

“But tomorrow’s a weekday, right? What about school tomorrow, anedeshi? You’re skipping it?”

“Public schools have graduation ceremonies today. I’m starting Spring Break from tomorrow onwards. It has nothing to do with the unemployed Yaichi though.”

“Unemployed... I’m a professional Shogi player.”

Though I didn’t enter High School.

Recently, a few players chose to enter High School or college. In fact, most

would attend High School, but I, who became a pro in Autumn of my third year, had given up on my studies and chose to enter the path of Shogi.

If I chose to further my studies... I'll be in my second year of high school starting next month.

I have nothing good about me other than Shogi, and never once regretted my choice to not further my studies. However, if anyone's to ask me if I'm happy with spending entire days talking about Shogi, I would say that a lot of times, it's painful...

"Leaving that aside, anedeshi, these trousers—"

"I'll kill you if you dare forget about our match tomorrow."

Anedeshi reminded me, raised the umbrella, and elegantly strolled to the station, leaving me with Master's trousers (still dirty).

"Haaa...I'm going back."

I folded the trousers, put them in a second bag, and opened my cellphone, switching it on.

I got on to the internet, and opened the 'Shogi + Chess Board' on the massive imageboard, and searched for discussion threads with my name mentioned. My name's at the top! How popular.

"Kuzu Ryuuou" Yaichi Kuzuryuu is expected to lose his title as Ryuuou Discussion thread 108 (30% win rate) "...Looks like they increased in numbers."

The rules state that we're to switch off electronic devices during matches, so I could not check, but I remembered that there was less than a 100 replies this morning. I sure am popular...

Recent matches are uploaded onto the internet, and passionate Shogi fans(?) will watch the matches in the day, giving their views. Let's see them.

"Everyone, let's discuss on the 4th Middle School Shogi player, the youngest title holder in Shogi history at 16 years and 4 months—the fastest to reach the peak of the Shogi world, Ryuuou Yaichi Kuzuryuu!"

"Just trash who wasted his talent after reaching the top."

“Just a scumbag who cared about the massive prize money from the Ryuuou match, and plays his matches carelessly against the rest.”

“A scumbag amongst scumbags who plays loose losing games against other players and yet goes all out against his Master.”

“Just got back. How did he play today? Succeeded with the repayment?”

“He played a Bear in the Hole formation at his master, and killed him off by turtling.”^[9]

“You kidding me... he’s a real scumbag”

“He won today, but it’s not an official match, so his losing streak continues!”

“This guy’s playstyle has been really boring ever since he won the title.”

“True. He gave up quickly, and only cared about defenses, not initiating any offenses at all.”

“He just plays set, rigid Shogi, and loses in a boring manner too. The worst trash of a Ryuuou.”

“If he keeps losing until October and loses his title as Ryuuou, he might become a legend.”

“Being the youngest title hold and the youngest to lose it... what a genius.”

“So, what happens if he loses his title?”

“He became an 8th dan after winning the title, so he’ll become 8th dan Yaichi Kuzuryuu.”

“818 dan LMAO.”^[10]

“Sounds better than being a Ryuuou LOL.”

“Start folding paper cranes and pray that he can ascend towards that.”

...Reading till here, I silently kept my cellphone back into my pocket. My stomach hurts...

After I challenged the Ryuuou, there was a sudden spike in discussion, and the moment I won the title, it ended up being a hive that really hated me.

Once I lost, they would say ‘the title of Ryuuou doesn’t suit me’; if I won, they

would complain ‘such a boring game’. I really didn’t understand why these guys hated me.

Meanwhile, ‘Cute and Smart’ Ginko Sora is often discussed as ‘the best in history’—however, she’s popular with Shogi fans, and has people discussing this for her. Damn it... I’m so envious...

I—Yaichi Kuzuryuu is a ‘pro Shogi player’.

A pro player means being an official member of the ‘Japanese Shogi Association’... simply put, they’re people who live on Shogi, and definitely not some unemployed folk.

Male or female, young or old, even with some slight communication difficulties, anyone with strong Shogi skills can become a professional Shogi player. If they’re strong enough, they can earn honor and money, and if they’re too weak, in 10 years, minimum, they’ll retire.

The world of professional Shogi players, a simple world where ability dictates everything.

To become such a pro player, other than ability, there’s also one other condition—the need for a ‘master’.

To become a pro player, one has to be under the mentorship of a professional player.

Such a ‘master-disciple’ standard forms the basis of the Shogi world...I don’t know anything about the others, but in Shogi, there’s no benefit to raising a disciple.

The so-called tradition in the world of Shogi is all give and no take.

Anedeshi and I were under the tutelage of Master Kiyotaki, and under his guidance, we played thousands of matches. For our sake, he gave up his time and effort.

“And he lost in the last match...”

Even though it’s necessary for the continual state and development of the world of Shogi, I just felt that raising a disciple is just all hassle and no benefit. Will I lose to a disciple one day and piss out of the window of the venue...?

“No... but it’s too early for me to have a disciple!”

There are other instances of people winning titles in their teenage years, but a teenager having disciples was unheard of.

I guess I would wait until I’m past 20 before I start taking disciples, and I do think that I’m not the time to spare time for my disciples. Besides, ‘and he has time to take care of others’, I might get criticized on the internet...

While wondering about such things, I reached home.

I live alone at the shopping street near the Kansai Shogi Association, and it was just less than a 10 minute work.

It’s an old apartment building without autolock or elevator, and to get rid of the loneliness, I shouted as I returned home.

“I’m back~! There’s no one at home huuuuhhh!?”

There was someone inside.

There was someone in the apartment that was supposedly empty.

An unfamiliar girl—definitely an elementary school girl no matter how I looked at her, was in my house. She looked at me, and said enthusiastically,



“Welcome back! Master!!”

.....What?

Seeking Out a Master

Let's sort this out first.

There was a little girl in what should have been an empty room, and she was staring at me with wide, sparkling eyes.

It's a really cute girl.

Age-wise... probably in elementary school, carrying a school bag.

Her slender limbs are in a proper Seiza posture, staring at me like a puppy while I was standing on the corridor. There was a large carrying bag by her side.

I... didn't remember ever seeing her.

An unfamiliar elementary school girl was in my house, but why?

Just to note, this house, which I rented after graduating from Middle School, is a 2DK. [\[11\]](#)

Actually, I only needed a room, but for some reason, when I was looking for a room, anedeshi joined in for some reason, and decided to rent this place. Why could anedeshi decide this for me anyway? Isn't this my house?

Leaving that aside, the important thing would be the elementary school girl before me.

"Erm... you are? And why are you in my house?"

"Yes! Erm, Yaichi K-Kuduryuryu!"

She bit her tongue!

"A-are you alright? You spoke so fast that you bit your tongue..."

"...bar you...?"

It appeared she was really hurting.

The teary girl waited for her tongue to recover, "Kuzu... Kuzuryu..." and then tried practicing my name again. Do your best!

And then.

“Are you... Kuhyuu... Ku... Kuzu... sensei!?”

She gave up!!

“I am...”

I guess this would continue forever if I tried correcting her. An eternal zero.

But I was really a little surprised.

As the youngest title holder in history, my photo should normally appear on the tabloids, and there are occasional moments of people talking to me. Stuff like, you play Shogi, bro? Looks shady man! and so on. You got to be joking.

However, this little girl called me by my full name, and even added the title ‘sensei’ (though she didn’t say it well). It was the first time for me outside the Shogi Association.

What this unfamiliar elementary school girl said next shocked me beyond my expectations.

“As promised, please have me as your disciple!!”

...Huh?

“Eh...? Disciple? Eh?”

“Yes! Erm... yes!!”

“Me? I promised to have you as my disciple?”

“Yes!!”

“Eh? When?”

“Eh? E-erm...last year...during the last Ryuuou match...”

“...?”

“...You forgot?”

She asked nervously, and I recalled the battle for the title 3 months back—

7th Round of the Ryuuou Match

Three wins, three losses, the final round of the full set 7 round Ryuuou match, held in a posh hotel at the Ishikawa-ken Wakura Onsen.

The result of the piece toss determined that I, the challenger would have the chance to start for the fourth time, and I decided to start with an undefined joseki.^[12]

The opposing Ryuuou agreed, and chose to fight head on. Since the match started, there were no precedent moves to be followed, and it became an intense battle.

It just so happened that the match occurred on the 24th and 25th of December–Christmas.

The Ryuuou matches all around the country has a ‘2-day schedule’ that occurs over the same number of days, and there was an explanatory arena beside the match arena, with typically 200 people or so watching, but I guessed nobody would be watching on this day... so I thought.

Turned out that I worried too much.

99% of the participants were male, and 97% bespectacled. Anedeshi entered the explanatory arena, “This place is full of men and glasses.” so she said without thinking. Many Shogi enthusiasts ignored the fact that it was Christmas, and came to this already packed hotel even though it was snowing hard.

About 800 Shogi youths left behind their wives, children and lovers aside and gathered in this hall, satisfied as long as they had Shogi. It was like a Christmas present bestowed by the God of Shogi, and on this White Christmas, this battle became a rare intense one.

The pro players discussing the match up in the rest room determined that the

Sente has the advantage! The Gote is about to reverse the situation! The battle continued on, with the result still undetermined.^[13]

And so, came the end game.

The allotted time was about to run out, and at this moment, I found a move to checkmate the opponent, and I could not help but shiver.

Just one more move.

Just one more move, and I would win. Again, I checked the moves, and determined that there was no way I could be wrong.

—I win?

The moment I had that thought, I just could not bring myself to move.

My hand was trembling, and I could not hold onto the Shogi piece.

“...!?”

It was the first time I encountered this. I had a few moments of anxiety beforehand, but to be trembling so much that I could not lift the piece...

I could not move with my hand, but at the very least, I could say the move with my mouth.

But I could not do that either.

“...! ...!!”

I could not let out my voice.

I tried to get my throat working, but the anxiety left me nauseous. I wanted to soothe my throat with a cup of water, and reached out for it, but I could not stop trembling, and toppled it over.

—Calm down. Just one more move, and I win.

I tried my best to act calm, got up from my seat, and slowly walked out of the arena. I left, and went straight to the toilet, puking into the basin over and over again. I did not eat much for lunch, so I was only puking out gastric juices. I puked until I could not, but the nauseous feeling just did not subside.

“Gah...! uu... uuuu...”

There was only a few minutes left. I got to hurry back...

But the more I got anxious, the giddier I got, and my knees went weak. I ended up being unable to stand up right.

—Just one more step.

—Just one more step, and I would become Ryuuou...

The prize money of 42 million Yen, the highest honor in the world of Shogi, a special promotion to 8th dan, and I would leave my name in the records.

Such a notion flashed by my mind, and I felt disgusted again, my head giddy.

I lost my sense of balance, and I literally crawled out of the toilet.

If I walked, I could reach back in less than 30 seconds, but the straight corridor just felt so far away, as though it was the distance to the moon. My Japanese clothing, soaked in sweat, was as heavy as lead.

—...Am I going to run out of time here...?

Right when I had that worry,

“Erm.”

Someone called out to me.

The owner of the voice knelt towards me, and then said,

“Please have some water.”

“!!”

I crawled to the cup, brought my face over, and that person clamped my face with both hands, tilted the cup slowly, and poured water for me to drink. The cold water seeped through my entire body at that moment.

“Ahh...”

Without knowing it, my shivering and dizziness vanished like magic.

I think I had some words with the owner of the voice, but my mind was filled with Shogi, as the allotted time was about to run out.

“...Thank you.”

I finally thanked the person, and walked to the arena—

And so, I became the Ryuuou.

Entrance Test

“...Were you the one who gave me water?”

“Y-yes! It’s me!”

The girl clenched her fists, and put them on her knees, nodding hard.

“So it was you...”

.....I had no impression at all.

Well, yeah, I did vaguely remember talking to someone, but I completely forgot how that person looked like, and I didn’t remember the content exactly.

“So, I said that I would take you in as my disciple?”

“Uu... well...”

“Hm?”

“Actually... it was a little different...”

The girl seemed hesitant as she talked.

Maybe she just expanded too much on what I was getting at, and what I actually wanted to say was, “Hello, I’ll teach you Shogi!” or some frivolous promise.

“So, what did I say back then?”

“You said ‘once I get the title, I’ll promise to do anything you say’.”

I made such a ridiculous promise.

Did I really say that...? I guess I did. In the heart of a shogi player, the title is more important than anyone else, so much that one can sell his heart out to the devil for that; promising a kid would be nothing in comparison. If the God of Shogi told me “If you want to become a Meijin, eat shit.”, I will do that without hesitation.

But...why was it that she wanted to become my disciple...

And I just made up my mind that I would never take in any disciples...

"...Understood. I'll do that."

"Really!?"

"But first, you need to pass a test."

"Test...?"

"I need to be sure of your abilities first."

Saying that, I went to the Japanese room inside.

This apartment, located near the Shogi Association, is often visited by young shogi players and anedeshi, so the Japanese-styled room became a shogi room.

"Please come in, though it's not exactly clean."

"Pl-please pardon me..."

I invited her to the cushions, and sat with a thud.

This girl, all frozen up as she sat before me, was really an endearing kid

She has a nice-looking face, but it's her proper manners that gave me a good impression of her.

Even now, she had her little limbs placed neatly, and I, a shogi player, was captivated by that pretty seiza posture. It's rare to see that from kids nowadays.

"But, how did you get into my house...did I leave the door unlocked...?"

"S-sorry! It's..."

My place became a waiting room for young people, so I left the door unlocked for anyone who wanted to come in. There's no valuables other than Shogi boards to steal. It's not good to leave them behind in such a conspicuous place after all.

"Also...while waiting, I was worried if I would be bothering you."

"That's true."

I'll be given weird looks if an unfamiliar elementary school girl is to wander around in front of my house. She's a curious one. However, I'm also worried about 'cracking sounds that occur in the middle of the night'."

“But anyway, you knew where my house was?”

“You wrote down your address in the thank-you book of our hotel, sensei.”

“Ahh, now that you mentioned it—”

I remembered that after I became the Ryuuou, various people talking to Master.

“Eh? Then you are the daughter of the owner of that hotel?”

“Yes! I’m the daughter of the owner of the hot spring resort ‘Hinatsuru’, Ai Hinatsuru! Third grade... ah, I’ll be in Fourth Grade in April!”

“Third grade... huh.”

“I’m 9! I’ll be 10 this year!”

Hearing that age, I was shocked.

So that meant that her age’s not even in double digits...

“It’s far from that hotel to this place. You came alone?”

“Yes! I took the ‘Thunderbird’!”

The Limited Express train between the Hokuriku region and Osaka, huh? It’s true that there was no need to transfer trains on the ride from the Onsen area of ‘Hinatsuru’ to Osaka Station.^[14]

It’s a round loop from Osaka station to this place. I don’t think this is some huge adventure... anyway.

“Your parents allowed you to come here?”

“Y-yes! Erm... my parents... know...”

“Hm?”

Why did she seem to stammer out of a sudden...?

I guess her parents are passionate shogi enthusiasts since they invited players and had a title match here. However, letting her come alone might not be down to the education directive of ‘a cute girl should go on a journey’.

“Well, since you want to come by, why didn’t you notify me? I was shocked by this sudden visit.”

“Erm... I-I wrote you a letter hoping that you’ll accept me as your disciple, but I never got a reply...”

“...”

I sheepishly look at the mailing inbox, and found a large number of flyers and letters inside.

I didn’t bother to read them as I was lazy... and besides, the Association would send mails to contact me recently...

“I-I see. Sorry about that. Yeah.”

Assuming that this girl was lying, it didn’t matter either.

—I don’t have any intention of having her as my disciple either.

It’s too much of a stretch for me, in my teenage years, to raise a disciple, and at this point, I had no heart to care for others. Also, I didn’t want to go about spraying my pee everywhere just because I lost to my disciple.

In that case, I could only agree in another method, and have her give up on being my disciple.

“Okay then...”

I took out the shogi board from the wall shelf, and brought it before Ai Hinatsuru-chan.

“Wh-what an amazing shogi board...!”

“Take care of it. I’m not done repaying the loan.”

The price of the shogi board and pieces combined would be the equivalent of a new car.

It’s a shogi board 7 inches thick (about 21cm), and has legs, so when I put it before the elementary school girl who was kneeling, it practically blocked half of her body.

While Ai-chan was overwhelmed by the physical presence, I continued to pressure her mentally.

“I’m a pro player. I can only accept a disciple who’ll become a pro player.”

In fact, it wasn't the case. I just said it.

"So I need to know if you have that talent, go it?"

It was just an excuse.

Even though I had 11 straight losses in official matches, less than 30% win rate for the year, and was dire, there was no way I could lose to an elementary school kid. It's pitiful, but I intended to send her crying back home, and give up on being my disciple.

"I'm going test your mettle. I'm not going to play with any handicaps."

"Yes! Please do so!!"

Oh? I wondered.

Even after she was intimidated by me, she straightened her back, and answered me enthusiastically.

—She passed in her guts and posture, in any case.

There seemed to be a light breeze flowing into the room, even though the windows were sealed.

Double Wing Attack^[15]

We took out the brown shogi pieces from the box, and laid them out onto the table.

The movements of how a person lay out the pieces would give a rough indicator of how much shogi experience she had.

As for this little girl before me—Ai Hinatsuru-chan,

“Nnsh... nnsh...”

...To be honest, it was very casual.

She seemed to be hastily laying them onto the board, not knowing where to put them. She was having much difficulty in laying them onto the squares, probably due to tension. It appeared I would win with ease.

Once we were done laying them out, I said,

“You can start first.”

“Yes! Please take care of me!!”^[16]

“Please take care of me.”

We bowed towards each other, and so the match began.

So, let’s see her shogi abilities.

“Suu, haa.....nn!!”

Ai-chan took a deep breath, scowled, curled her lips, put her hand on the pawn before the rook, and advanced one step forward.

“Hmm, so the ‘static rook’ type...”

In shogi, the playstyles can be basically classified as ‘Static Rook’ or ‘Ranging Rook’.^[17]

Simply put, the ‘Static Rook’ requires deliberate and logical thinking; in blood type terms, it would be similar to A type. ‘Ranging Rook’ emphasizes lots on

feeling, and basically B type. Just to note, anedeshi and I are both of the ‘Static Rook type’. Of course, Master’s of the ‘Static Rook type’ too. He might look that way, but he was the delicate type too.

Since she made this move, I too responded with moving the pawn before my rook.

3rd turn—Ai-chan immediately moved the same pawn before the rook, and advanced it a step forward.

This is—

“...Double Wing Attack?”^[18]

It was the same shogi move I played during the 7th match of the Ryuuou battle—at Ai-chan’s house.

We let the pawns before our rooks move forward, and this would be the most basic, undefined, and intensive battle sequence, as though we’re charging forward naked, swinging axes about.

This was the ‘Double Wing Attack’.

This elementary school girl really intended to challenge the Ryuuou head on... huh?

“...Looking down on me...?”

I muttered subconsciously, and let my rook advance one step further.

There was a saying that *“shogi is a conversation by itself”*.

It is not simply about moving pieces; once one’s abilities are of a certain standard, it is possible to establish conversations on the board.

“I have confidence in my own ability! Please go all out and don’t hold back!”

“This shitty brat doesn’t know her own limits... fine. I’ll show you. Come on!”

The first four steps had this intent.

There was no fixed sequence in the ‘Double Wing Attack’. Soon, we entered an unknown development.

Naturally, I started with a massive advantage from the opening. I used a few

tricks and some professional skill to rattle the girl's formations, with no chance to fight back, and cornered her king.

“Ah... uu...”

Ai-chan easily fell into a pit, and showed a teary look.

We entered the middle game, almost at the end game where the victor was to be decided. This often happened in Double Wing Attacks.

“...This should be it.”

I felt that this would be enough to determine her ability, and to end this as quickly as possible, I deliberately moved on with strong attacks, using my major pieces to corner the opposing gyoku to the bottom row, and launched an attack with the silver general.^[19]

In the face of such potent attacks, Ai-chan would naturally choose to solidify her defenses. That should be the case.

However—

“.....Like this..... like this... like this...”

“Hm?”

[illegible]



Once she saw me make this move—the girl’s teary eyes suddenly flickered.



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The girl's move—was an offensive one.

This move landed on the board, the impact like a punch to this careless me.

“...!?”

On first glance, it was a bad move.

Attacking against an attack would appear to be no different from self-destruction.

However, this attack meant that she saw it was a faint, and I felt a bone-chilling strike through me.

“!? ...no way...!?”

The more I pondered, the more I felt the sharp force of the ‘unbelievable’ thought I once had aimed right at my throat.

“You plan to sacrifice the knight to pull a fork on the king and silver general? But if I let the gyoku king on 6-One escape, following that will be rook on 4-Seven, 6-two Silver...gyoku to the same spot, and checkmate!? If gold general diagonally down to 8-three, it'll be check with the promoted silver!? Th-this girl...”^[20]

—How many steps in advance did she predict?

I could not help but look up and stare at the girl seated before me.

She never noticed my stare, and was leaning forward as though she had just finished a sprint, surveying the board, shaking, “...Like this like this like this like this like this like this like this like this ...”

She muttered without saying anything, her eyes obviously swirling on the shogi board at an amazing speed, processing the massive and complicated moves that numbered in millions.

There's no me on the board.^[21]

She never bothered with solidifying her defenses or tried to please me.

“This girl...!”

–Ai Hinatsuru’s definitely going for the kill!!

Once I had such a thought, I shivered.

I was not terrified of losing to an elementary school girl, just the opposite. As a shogi player seeking truth on the board showing an unknown development, I instinctively felt delighted.

Also—as a competitor, there was the delight of facing a powerful opponent.

“...Not bad.”

I licked my lips, put on my glasses I would wear for matches, pulled myself together, and started attacking too.

I never took a step back. I would never do that.

Ai too showed no intention of doing to the same, and while it’s hard to imagine given her cute appearance, she’s conveying her convictions with stubborn, forceful methods.

...Like this, like this, like this like this like this like this like this—yes!!”

The little killer stood up slightly, tried her best to reach her arm forward, and fired a diagonal bullet towards my gyoku. Of course, I fought back immediately. Kill or be killed, I would die if I tried to defend.

A messy skirmish with no regards for defense.

The sound of the piece clicking got louder, and our thoughts clashed intensely as a bloody battle occurred.

Without knowing it, I forgot that the person in front of me was an elementary school girl, and I was crushing her heart with all my might.

Post-mortem

“...I lost.”

I suddenly heard those words.

Ai's end game was far stronger than I assumed.

But more importantly—I felt overwhelming joy during that time.

This was the first time I felt such sweet, agitating time ever since I challenged the top pro during the Ryuuou match.

Of course, a person alone could not play shogi.

So if the opponent's strength was overwhelmingly strong or weak, there would never be a 'classic game' developed.

Both sides grappling each other, giving their best moves on the grand stage, the winner would win by the skin of his teeth, and the loser making it the most beautiful stage possible.

These are the criteria of creating a 'classic game'.

This match couldn't be considered one. It would be too shoddy and clumsy to call it one.

But no matter how capable a shogi player is—even a pro player with the latest research—there will be insignificant games. This is shogi that will cause people's heart to cool down.

In contrast, if it was some strange shogi that ignored the latest research, that goes against common play, or that both sides keep making miscues, that would excite the human heart more.

No matter how much was said, without the words from the heart, one would not be moved, and without playing with the heart in it, people would not be moved.

If one was to put in courage, will and pride, timidity and fear and tenacity and

stubbornness and passion and hope and despair and guts—‘the thoughts’ of a player—shogi will get people fired up. More than ever.

Ai’s shogi caused me to recall that thought.

That shogi was such a passionate, delightful thing.

I was terrified of the heavy pressure from the title of Ryuuou, feared losing, concerned about criticism on the internet and the looks from others, did my best to play safe as Master’s opponent, and sidestepped while he attacked me. This me no longer had that passion and joy from back then

My heart, cooled from the 11 straight losses, just felt excited, and something seemed to lit up my heart.

“E-erm...”

After the match, I was wondering about this, still dumbfounded, and Ai spoke to me uneasily.

“S-sensei, erm—”

“Here.”

“Eh?”

“What did you play after I made this move?”

“Ah, erm, well... this.”

I focused my attention back on the match, and let both sides reveal their thoughts.

This is called ‘Post mortem’, a unique method of learning in shogi, and in any case, feels like a reflection.

Even for pros, not every move would be a good mood.

Limited time and stamina meant that the less mistakes, the likelier the chances of winning. We are humans are all.

“Shogi is that if there is a mistake at the last moment, all is lost.”^[22]

There was this saying.

However, in a post mortem, one could seek the perfect scenario in a relaxed

manner, and seek the truth of shogi without any restrictions. It's the most enjoyable time in shogi. However, it's frustrating after a loss.

"...I see. That's good."

Once I affirmed Ai's thoughts, again, I was moved by the ability she showed in the end game.

"Messy opening and middle game, but brilliant performance in the end game. Very sharp instincts reading the board when the match is on the line."

"N-no, that's... th-thank you very much... ehehe ≡"

"Do you often play Double Wing Attack?"

"Often... you ask? Erm..."

Ai lowered her head, looking sheepish, and stated the shocking truth with a teeny-weeny voice.

"I... only know this move..."

"Eh!?"

I was speechless, and Ai, blushing, leaned over, saying,

"I saw your match in the Ryuuou battle, sensei, and I thought, "that's amazing!", so I started learning shogi! I want to be a shogi player like you, sensei, so I kept imitating your moves—"

"Wait! ...eh? Wait a moment...?"

That sudden declaration left me confused.

...She only knew Double Wing Attack as an opening? In other words, she only knew how to move the rook forward? A beginner? What if she faced a Ranging Rook?

No, more importantly—**she started after seeing my Ryuuou title match...?**

"Eh? Then... you started shogi about 3 months back...?"

"E-erm... yes. I'm sorry..."

Ai apologized to be dejectedly, probably thinking that I was angry.

No no no no no, this... should be something major, right?

It's something big for an elementary school girl with 3 months of shogi experience to fight the Ryuudou to a standstill, but it's even bigger when there's an elementary school player who has the end game ability to corner the Ryuudou.

"Erm... senseeei?"

"Hmm? Ah, yes?"

"I-I... erm... test..."

Ai's eyes were moist, erm, erm, and repeated those words over and over again.

"Test?"

"Erm... disciple..."

"Ah."

That's right. This was an entrance test. Yes, yes.

I intended to use this as an excuse to reject her, but I completely forgot about it.

"Hm, let's see..."

I pretended to ponder over it, but to me, having a disciple did not matter at this point.

I wanted to play a few more rounds against this girl.

"Still unsure of your abilities. Anyway, how about another round?"

"Y-yes!!"

Her face lit up immediately, and she hurriedly rearranged the shogi pieces.

After that, we continued playing until who knew what time, even forgetting our meals as we kept playing shogi.

We kept playing, late into the night.

第二譜

A i H i n a t s u r u

雛鶴 あ い

生年月日 10月7日(9歳)

血液型 AB

出身地 石川県七尾市

クラス 3年2組

特技 料理(特にカレー!).

家事全般。

詰将棋。

好物 蟹。バターライス。



2nd Score

The First Morning

“...U...nn...?”

Kok kok. Tok tok. I woke up to those sounds.

“Smell of... miso soup?”

A homely scent reaches me, and I, who just woke up, is left confused

Strange? This is... where is this place?

“...Did I wander into Master’s house? Keika-san’s cooking...?”

Was I actually dreaming of the days when I was serving my discipleship? So I wondered, but it was not the case.

I opened my eyes, and found that it was the 2DK apartment I rented, the smartphone by my pillow indicating that it was almost noon.

“Ah... speaking of which, we played shogi until late into the night...”

Rather than late into the night, it would be more precise to say that it was almost dawn. The opponent was unable to withstand the sleepiness, and was drowsy, so we ended our match, and went to bed.

As for that opponent, I remember—

“Ah! Master! Good morning!”

I walked out of the bedroom, and an energetic voice immediately greeted me.

There was an elementary school girl dressed in an apron, standing at the kitchen.

“...”

I got to repeat this, since it's very important.

There's someone in the kitchen! In an apron!! An elementary school girl!!
Standing there!!

"...Erm.""

"Ai! Ai Hinatsuru! I became your disciple yesterday!"

"Eh? No, I never said anything about taking disciples—"

"Breakfast is almost down here! Please enter the bath, Master!"

"B-bath?"

I entered the bathroom, with the elementary school girl pushing me from behind, and found that there was already hot water inside.

Ever since I started living by myself, I would take showers, so this might be the first time I had a leisure bath in my house. Also—

"There's some nice smell from the hot water..."

"Yes! I brought some 'Wakura Bath Salt' from home! It's a bath soap that contains minerals from our onsen! It can relieve fatigue and make people feel good ♪"

Right, this kid's family owns an onsen inn...

An inn, but it felt like a luxurious hotel. That place won the top prize in Japan for consecutive years, and the Emperor himself lived there, or so I heard during Christmas Eve...

Huh?

Then, isn't this kid... some rich princess?

"Please put your dirty clothes in the basket there. I shall wash them later. Shall I put your change of clothes and the towel here?"

"Ah, yeah."

Before I knew it, this elementary school girl knew where the clothes and towels were at. This development surely isn't normal, but as I had just woken up, my head was still groggy.

It felt as though I arrived in a hotel, having a towel fight. I soaked myself in the bath salted water, and continued to enjoy this gracious care.

“Master! Breakfast is ready!”

“Ah, yes.”

“I’ll serve it immediately.”

I had a nice good bath while the sun was high, and with much relief, sat at the short Japanese table as plain but intricately prepared, piping hot food was served before me. Such exceptional house-making skills overwhelmed me,

“Sorry. I took the food from the fridge.”

“It’s fine...”

The scrumptious meal before my eyes stunned me, and I took the bowl. It was a hill of rice.

“Amazing. You prepared everything?”

“Yes! There was a lot of food in the fridge, so I can’t help but use that much.”

“What’s this black thing?”

“Seaweed! Simmered Seaweed!”^[23]

“Why is there simmered seaweed here?”

“I made it. There’s dried seaweed and sauces here.”

“Eh? You can make that at home?”

“A frying pan will do, though?”

“I-I see... itadakimasu...”

“Sorry that it’s just some simple dishes.”

With the elementary school girl seated in a seiza, staring at me, I reached my chopsticks for the dishes.

So, let’s see how it tastes—

“Um! This is delicious! You’re amazing!”

“Ehehe ≡”

Upon hearing me praise her, Ai looked really delighted, grinning like a puppy.

At the very least, it was different from how tentative she was the previous day.

I guess this was her true nature. Shogi could show the personality of an opponent, and this girl was a feisty one who would not back down. 100% full offense. Most female shogi players are like this, like anedeshi, and anedeshi, and anedeshi.

“Hm? Ai-chan, you aren’t eating?”

“Yes! I have to serve you, Master! I’m the disciple!”

“Enough with that, let’s eat together. You’re hungry now, right?”

I was very concerned by her service. Besides, I never agreed to take her in as a disciple.

I had her sit opposite the table, and we faced each other as we had our meals.

“Then... erm, itadakimasu...”

“Yep.”

“...”

“...”

...Just awkward.

There was a strange feeling as I face her, having this meal... no, I’m not getting excited by an elementary school girl? I just mean that I’m nervous, you know? You get it, right?

It’s one thing if it’s playing shogi, but any other occasions, and it’s a common symptom for shogi players to get tense as long as we had to face someone of the opposite gender. Even if she’s an elementary school student...

“Erm... Master? There’s a lot of ingredients in the fridge. Do you cook for yourself?”

“Hm? Ahh, that’s not me, but my anedeshi...”

“Ane? Master, you have an older sister?”^[24]

“Not exactly... well, kinda.”

Anedeshi would always come by my house to do some cooking to practice ‘living by herself’, so she said (at the very least, it looked like cooking). To be honest, the (what appears to be) cooking was hard to swallow, but if I did not eat, I would be whacked by the corners of a 7 inch board, so I could only force myself to swallow. A 7 inch board would normally crack a skull, and I still have some outstanding loan.

“Well, leaving that aside... I remember you saying that you have been playing shogi for three months? How did you study?”

“Ah, yes!”

Ai put her hands down, and sat properly.

“Back in our hotel, my dead grandp... grandfather loved shogi, and had a lot of books about shogi, so I read them. I couldn’t read when there’s a lot of kanji though...”

“That’s it?”

“And then, when I helped out at home, I would try to solve tsumeshogi. My household owns an onsen inn, and I needed to help in lots of things, so solving them took up the most time.”^[25]

I see, I see. Tsumeshogi; no wonder she displayed such ability during the end game.

It’s not that solving tsumeshogis will naturally improve one’s shogi abilities. There are some tsumeshogi authors that do not play shogi. However, this method might suit her.

“Anyway, I’m impressed. You managed to keep studying even while helping out with work.”

Normally, she would have angered others for playing shogi while helping, but this was my opinion of her as a shogi player. If you have the time to study, why not practice shogi? This is the world for us.

“Ehehe. It was tough trying to memorize the puzzles at first, but I can easily recite them now.”

Hm, **memorize**... the puzzles?

“...Wait a moment. You memorized the puzzles? You didn’t bring any book or copies along?”

“Yes. Erm, at first, I brought them along with me, but mama found them... but now that I remember them, I won’t forget, so it’s fine even though my book got confiscated!”

“An-anyway... how many puzzles can you remember at one go?”

“About 30 puzzles? If they’re long, 10 puzzles at most.”

Wait wait wait wait wait...

It’s already amazing that she’s able to memorize the puzzles and solve them in her head, but she could memorize 30 puzzles at once? And not forget after she memorize them once? What’s her mind made of...

“W-what kind of puzzles did you solve? 3 step tsumeshogi?”

“I just solved this recently.”

Ai took out an old book from the bag in the corner of the room.

And the words written on the book was ‘Shogi Drawings’^[26]

“I couldn’t solve the last puzzle at all, until I finally managed to do it while taking the train here! It’s really difficult.”

“Y-you really..... solved that... one?”

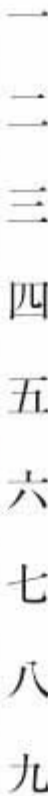
“Yes, six hundred and eleven steps, right?”

...Correct. No way...

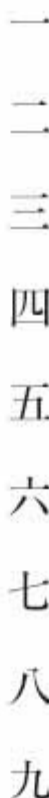
“Shogi Puzzles”, a famous collection of really difficult tsumeshogi puzzles by a shogi player in the Edo Period called Kanju Ito, and there are 100 puzzles altogether.

Each of them are famous in their own right, but the last three, ‘Naked Gyoku’, ‘Smoke Mate’ and ‘Long Life’ are hailed as three of the biggest masterpieces in tsumeshogi history, artistic, and unbelievable in difficulty. It’s definitely not something an elementary school kid can simply solve and then say “It’s difficult, that’s all.”^[27]

[28]



[29]



A terrifying board, isn't it?

Unbelievable, right?

This is tsumeshogi, and then...

She solved it in six hundred and eleven steps, inside her head, without using any board...

"I spent 2 weeks solving every puzzle in this book, but I was really happy when I was done! I feel like making my own tsumeshogi too ♪"

Seeing that innocent, delighted face on that elementary school kid, I couldn't help but feel a chill up my spine.

This kid is... way too weird.

Her talent's definitely extraordinary. A pro player will need several months to solve the 'Drawings'. There was a saying in the past that anyone who can solve this 'Drawings' and another really difficult tsumeshogi collection called 'Shogi Unrivalled' can become a pro player.^[30]

A girl who only started shogi three months ago, while helping with housework, solved it in 2 weeks...

It was too startling, and I could only stare at the simmered seaweed, while Ai-chan was probably worried by my attitude, as she worriedly asked,

"Erm... Master? Is 2 weeks too long?"

The opposite.

"W-well... it's rather amazing for an amateur, I guess? A pro can solve it on one glance though."

"...I guess."

"This 'Long Life' has six hundred and eleven steps, but it's still a work from the Edo Period. There are modern tsumeshogi puzzles that are longer."

"Like how?"

"'Micro Cosmos'. one thousand five hundred and twenty-five moves."

"Eh?"

“One thousand five hundred and twenty-five moves.”^[31]

“Hii... hiiiiiii...!”

“All pro players can solve it.”

If I’m Pinocchio, my nose would definitely be longer than the Abenos Harukas.
^[32]

“Pro players are amazing!” I tried my best to shun from the elementary school staring at me with glittering eyes as she commented, and asked, “...And? Any other methods you learned with?”

“Ah yes. I played shogi on the school internet.”

“Internet shogi?”

“Like ‘Two Four’ and ‘Wars’.

So Shogi Club 24 and Shogi Wars. That’s basic.

“I would borrow a smartphone or tablet from my friends if they brought them to school, and play after class. During class, I’ll reflect on the match and think of which moves were wrong.”

Hohoh, playing internet shogi on the tablet in school huh?

Times have changed... this might make a teenage brat sound like an old geezer here, but I did not continue my education after graduating from Middle School, and it had been a year since I left school, so everything felt nostalgic.

“...I’m full.”

“Yes! I’m full! Ah, I’ll brew tea for you now.”

She cleared the cutlery and utensils, and brewed tea. She really was a girl thorough with what she does.

Once she skillfully brewed tea for me, Ai washed the utensils at breakneck pace, and asked me, “Sorry, Master, may I borrow the washroom too...?”

“Ah, yeah. Take your time... and also, I’m not your Master.”

“Yes! Master!!”

A cheerful sound echoed from the bathroom, and I could only drop my

shoulders weakly.

VERSUS

I had a sip of tea, and started to change my mind about accepting Ai as a disciple.

“Talent-wise... she does have it.”

Tsumeshogi can improve a person’s shogi abilities, for one can learn how to ‘checkmate’.

“This method... was the same method to solve that tsumeshogi.”

This remedial-like lesson would seem to be very helpful for shogi, and if one is able to play to an end game situation through instincts, one would be able to reach out for victory further and faster than the opponent.

This is the end game ability.

Typically, end games patterns can only be experienced through feeling, but Ai’s extraordinary memory managed to accumulate a precise and vast set of information.

“In other words, if that kid... keeps playing shogi, and solves more tsumeshogi, she’ll get stronger.”

If I’m asked if she can be an outstanding female shogi player,

“Certainly. No problems.”

And if she was groomed carefully, attaining a title wouldn’t be difficult for her. There’s only a few of such female shogi players I knew who had such talent.

And—

“She only played for three months...”

Ai’s 9 years old.

But if she wanted to aim for the top of the shogi world, she’s a little late when it comes to age.

“Normally, they’ll get the rules memorized before entering elementary school, and by now, they should be starting with actual classes.”

There’s a vast difference in shogi ability compared to my anedeshi, twin title holder Ginko Sora, at age of nine.

Then again, anedeshi was the devil’s child, able to memorize all the rules of shogi at the age of two. Looking at potential, I can’t deny that Ai, who managed to improve so much in 3 months, has the talent to possibly surpass anedeshi. Also, there is a trend of females starting off later than male shogi players.

If one were to ask me if I wanted to groom her,

“Of course I want to groom her—”

She had outstanding talent.

Personality wise, she might be straightforward, but her defiant personality makes her suited to be a shogi player. She’s good at cooking. Hearing the humming from the bathroom, I suppose she’s good at singing too.

Furthermore, she has that angelic face that would likely peg her as a new idol in the world of shogi. Maybe millions of people would be added to the population of the world of shogi.

And all I want—would be to see what kind of shogi she would play in the future with that talent of hers.

“...Which means I can’t be her Master.”

Right.

I’m the ‘Scum Ryuuou’ who had difficulty handling my own business, so how could I possibly take care of an elementary school kid, a girl at that?

It’s impossible for me to have her as my disciple. It’s for her sake.

“In other words, I need her to be in someone else’s care... hm, who do I leave her to? Someone related to the Hokuriku—”

And right when I was wondering about that.

Ding Dong♪

The doorbell chimed.

“Yes? Who is that?”

“Me.”

“Eh?”

“Me.”

Ane... deshi...!?

“HAAA!!!”

Hurry! Got to get there fast!!

I rushed to the door at full sprint, grabbing the door handle firmly with both hands.

Anedeshi has the spare key, so normally, if I did not respond or was not at home, she would enter on her own. I did not mind, since I gave up on trying to explain to her, but this was a terrible situation! There’s an elementary school kid showering in my house!!

“Wh-what brings you here, anedehi!? Wh-wh-wh-wha-what do you want!?”

“VS”

“So I seeeeeeeeeeee!!!”

We promised this last night before we went home! I forgot about it! So many things happened!! An elementary school kid just entered my house!!

“Hurry up and open the door. It’s hot.”

Anedeshi prompted me, sounding really impatient. This ‘Snow White of Naniwa’ with white skin who’s weak to sunlight really hated waiting outside.

“No, erm... I’m a little... busy, right now...?”

“What?”

Anedeshi let out an impatient, and skeptical voice.

“Y-you see! I haven’t been in top form, right? Though I didn’t want to say this!”

“And so?”

“So I wanted to try a playstyle during our match today that I never did! I think I spent too much time...”

“You can try the Cheerful Central Rook or the Bishop Exchange Fourth File Rook all you want, but why do I have to wait outside?”^[33]

“Erm... I needed to prepare...”

There’s an elementary school kid bathing in here, so please wait! There’s no way I could say that, and I got increasingly unable to fend for myself.

I was unable to say anything, so anedeshi said,

“...Yaichi, are you bathing?”

She probably mistook because of the shower sounds. The bathroom window’s right next to the corridor.

“Y-yeah! Th-tha-that’s why I can’t open the door now!!”

If she were to see an elementary school kid she didn’t know of showering, then no matter what excuses I might find for myself, anedeshi would simply kill me without a second thought. If she’s not going to use the 7-inch board, she’s probably going to stuff my mouth, eyes, ears and anus with shogi pieces and drop me to sink into the Dojima River.^[34]

“I see. A shower.”

“Y-yes.”

“I’m relaxed then.”

“What?”

“...I thought you hated me, Yaichi.”

“Anedeshi...”

If she knew that there’s a nine-year-old kid living in my house, and bathing right now, there’s no way she would relax, but it’s cute when this ignorant her said such words.

However... what I said was half the truth.

Just two years ago, on October 1st, when I became a pro player, I fought my

way from the lowest division of the Ryuuou battles, the 6th group ranking battles, to the main battles, and from there, continued to beat down top players with top abilities, becoming the challenger. By the time I noticed, I charged up from the bottom of the shogi world to the top in the shortest distance possible.

I attained the honor of the youngest champion in shogi history at the age of 16 years and 4 months, and me attaining it 1 year and 2 months after being a pro was the fastest record in history. Most shogi players would fight on for thirty years or so, and retire as a 7th dan. In a year, I managed to catch up to their thirty years of hard work, and got a dream sequence for the Ryuuou battles. Even when eating cup ramen, it tasted like a Ryuuou, and the takeout food of the 'Yamagi Soba' opposite the road of the Association tasted like Ryuuou too, yep.

And then, Hell began.

3 months after I obtained the title of Ryuuou, I never won an official match. I suffered 11 straight defeats, and the losing streak just kept increasing. My win rate fell below 30%; my dream became a nightmare.

"And then, I finally realized, I managed to win the Ryuuou battle because I was too weak."

"Yaichi..."

"As someone who just turned pro, there's insufficient data on me, and so everyone let their guard down against me when they played me. I was the one who thoroughly analyzed the data on them, and planned strategies, and because I'm ranked lower, I could play with whatever style, whatever despicable methods. In fact, I played every match by harassing them to the point that they got impatient, and I came back to win..."

But after becoming Ryuuou, the situation changed completely.

My shogi skills were thoroughly analyzed, exposed in front of everyone, and nobody held back from attacking the weaknesses I laid bare.

And not only that. Once I got to the highest position in the world of shogi and got everyone's attention, shogi fans would demand high quality shogi befitting

of the position.

“That’s why I need to analyze all kinds of strategies and play shogi people will agree befits the position of the Ryuuou, and aim for the flawless shogi so that I won’t get criticized by others—”

“Yaichi.”

“What?”

“You suffered consecutive defeats not because you’re too weak. You aren’t weak at all. This isn’t—”

Right when anedeshi’s explaining this,

“Master. Please get me a towel.”

Ai just had to choose this perfect timing to walk out from the bathroom.

Her hair was dripping wet, and she was smiling away, not wearing anything at all. As the daughter of the onsen hotel, she had no issues going around naked, I guess ♪ But I’m troubled!”

“Wait!? Hey! Why did you come out while naked?”

“Sorry– (>_<)”

I forgot my towel. So Ai said carelessly. Why aren’t you panicking!? You’re fully naked!?

“...Did I just hear a girl’s voice?”

“N-no-no-no-not at all!? Sh-should be the TV, I guess?”

“But you don’t have a TV at home, Yaichi.”

“Master? Is there someone outside?”

“Not at all~! Nobody’s out there!!”

I yelled, loud enough for both anedeshi outside and Ai inside to hear. And then– “...”

I could hear some rustling from outside the door.

This is bad! Anedeshi’s looking for the key!?

“Nobody! Nobody’s inside here!”

I held the handle firmly, yelling as loudly as I could.

“Anyway, Master, what are you doing here?”

Ai asked, wondering that it was strange for me to be at the corridor. She’s still naked.

“Do-don’t worry about that! Get a towel and put on your clothes!”

“But the floor will get wet though?”

“It’s fine! It’s fine even if it gets wet! Wear some clothes, bring your stuff along, and hide in the cupboard!”

“Eh? Why do I have to hide?”

Gacha gacha gacha! Thud!!

“Yaichi! You’re holding onto the handle, right? Didn’t you say you’re showering!? Open up!”

“Eeeekkk!!”

“Master? Did someone come by?”

“Eh, this is...”

“...A woman?”

Ai’s voice got lower out of a sudden. Eh, sounds scary.

“Master! Who’s that outside!? Were’s that woman from!? Explain clearly!!”

“No! You’re not wearing anything!!”

“Not wearing anything!? There’s a naked girl there?”

The end game came without warning.

“Look at me!” Ai pulled me, causing me to fall to the floor, and at the same time, anedeshi opened the door—



This was the setup. Surely it was checkmate.

“Yaichi... who, is this young girl...?”

“Master!? Who is this woman!?”

If this was shogi, this could be ended with a surrender. Unfortunately, the game called life has no option to surrender, and no reset button. Seriously, this is a really shitty game.

The back of the Shogi Board

“...Anyway, didn’t I say so just now? It’s an unfortunate accident, and I didn’t do anything bad or anything that I should be guilty about!”

I was forced to seat in a seiza in the Japanese room (without a cushion), trying my best to fend for myself.

Anedeshi asked.

“And then?”

“‘And then?’ Look, anedeshi, did you really hear me out? I didn’t call this girl in here, she forced her way into my house! She insisted! Alone! From Hokuriku!”

“And then?”

“And! It’s the daughter of the hotel owner who invited us over to the title match, so if there was any slip-up, it’s not good for the Shogi Association, right? For the time being, I’ll take care of her, and it’s ensuring her safety at the same time.”

“And then?”

“A-and then, didn’t you say that I should try the Cheerful Central Rook or the Bishop Exchange Fourth File Rook? So—”

“So, you want to try it on a little girl?”

“That’s not it!!”

Anedeshi looked at me as though I was a lowlife, slandering my honor, and I solemnly protested.

“I have no intention of having her as a disciple, but I find that it’s not a bad thing to be teaching her shogi!”

“Ho? Yaichi, since when did you start being so passionate about learning shogi?”

“I-I just felt a little more responsibility after winning the title...”

Ai was seated in seiza, hiding behind me. Of course, she was already dressed up.

“..Pff.”

And troubling me was that Ai wasn’t terrified of anedeshi, at all. Those two looked like they’re sizing each other up. Elementary school kids sure don’t know what fear is...

“Yaichi.”

Anedeshi called my name, and pointed her fan at the corner of the room.

“Bring that 7-inch board here.”

“Yes...”

“Turn it around.”

“Like this?”

I turned the table upside down. Once done, I saw that there were the four legs and a strange ditch at the center, but I did not comprehend anedeshi’s intentions. Ai, hiding behind me, reached her neck out worriedly, looking at the back of the board.

“Yaichi, do you know what kind of shape do these legs of the shogi board take?”

“Legs? Hm... it’s probably some fruit...”

“Gardenia fruit.”

“No mouth?^[35]

“In other words, stop finding excuses before the shogi board.

I lowered my head, and bit my lips.

It’s not my fault that Ai came to my house, spent time here, showered, and got naked; they’re all beyond my control. Well... my excuses certainly are unfitting for a shogi player. Shogi players are forbidden from doing things like saying ‘wait’.

Anedeshi's more furious about me trying to make excuses than about Ai living in my house or being naked, so she brought the board out to teach me, the junior, a lesson.^[36]

Shogi taught me lots of important things...

"Also, over here. There is a ditch, no?"

"Yep."

"Do you know what that is?"

"Who knows?"

"This is called a 'blood pool', for chopping off the heads of those who maliciously made foul play, and for putting the head on, so that the blood can drip in, and no worry of dirtying the floor. You may leisurely leave your head there for others to chop, and I shall put your head there."^[37]

An unexpected request came from her mouth.

"Th-this has to be a joke... right?"

"There is a chopper in the kitchen, no?"

"Tell me you're joookkkkkiiiiinnng!!!"

What's with this person!? She's going to behead her junior with a chopper!? That's way too terrifying!!

"Please stop!"

Right when anedeshi was about to stand up and get the chopper, Ai charged out from behind me to stop her.

"I don't know your relationship with Master, but I don't think you have the right to do this!!"

She spread her arms wide like an anteater intimidating an enemy before it. "*What is this creature?*" Anedeshi showed such a face, and slowly asked, "...You don't know who I am? Even though you play shogi?"

"Not at all!!"

Hearing Ai's denial, I flusteredly explained,

“A-Ai, she’s my senior... like an older sister.”

“Older sister...?”

“And she’s the holder of two of the biggest titles ‘Queen’ and ‘Ladies Champion’—”

“Queen...?”

“Yeah yeah, Her Majesty. Very high, understand?”

“I-I understand!”

‘Wah wah wah’ Ai pointed her index finger at anedeshi in fear,

“You’re... an **S and M** person, right!?”

At that moment, I burst into laughter like an empty bag filled with air exploding.

Anedeshi threw the fan at me, the light gone from her grey eyes as she stared at her junior, calmly asking, “...What’s funny?”

“N-nothing at all! S-sorrriiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!? Wait, no! It hurts!! Stop whacking me with the faaaaaaaannnnnnnnnn!!”

“As-as I thought! I was right!”

“Way off, idiot!”

Anedeshi told off Ai. It was rare to see her react in such an agitated manner to someone other than me.

Such vigor intimidated Ai for a moment, but,

“Please don’t hit Master! Violence is not right! I oppose to corporal punishment!”

“This isn’t corporal punishment.”

“Then what is it!?”

“A reward?”

Anedeshi’s words and actions really seemed like SM.

“Anyway, no can do! Master’s supposed to be Ai’s Master, and teach Ai how

to play shogi!”

“Shut up, brat.”

“I’m not a brat! My name is Ai Hinatsuru!!”

“Then, kid. You’re noisy. Can’t you keep quiet?”

Shoo shoo. Anedeshi waved her off as though she was chasing a fly away.

“Muu~!” Ai’s face expanded like mochi, but she suddenly beamed, and said to anedeshi with a cute angelic face and voice, “Dara.”

“Huh?”

“Darabuchi.”

“...Wait, Yaichi. What is this kid saying?”

“Who knows...?”

Some dialect from Ishikawa prefecture? I couldn’t understand at all.

Anedeshi let out a little sigh, re-positioned herself on the cushion, and sat properly again.

I knew that her mood did not improve, and she did not forgive me.

As long as Ai kept calling me Master, her mood would become extremely horrible, and I could see her fiddling with her fingers to count the number of times Ai called me this. I’ve been watching.

“I, say, Ai-chan.”

“What is it, Master?”

“Is it okay if you don’t call me Master?”

“Eh? Then what do I call you then?”

“...You can think of that yourself.”

Anedeshi’s attitude towards that elementary school opponent was really spiteful, and my face tensed up.

“You can call me teacher or Ryuuou or anything you want. Anything other than Master.”

“Whatever I want...?”

Feeee, Ai put her hands on her cheeks, her eyes glittering as though the cake shelf was filled with them, put out in front of her as she gave that ‘I don’t know what to choose!’ look.

Since it was a rare quiet moment, I took a slow sip of hot tea. In turn, anedeshi opened the fan with the word ‘unyielding’ on it, and brought it to her face.^[38]

Ai then slowly lifted her gaze at me, and said tentatively,

“Th-then... Yaichi onii-chan. ≡”

I spat tea.

“Wh-why call me onii-chan here!?”

“Because I always wanted one!”

“...I get it. Just call me Master. Please call me Master.”

“Is that okay!? Yay yay!”

Crack.

I heard a strange sound, and was curious, so I turned to that direction... and found that anedeshi broke the fan. The ‘Unyielding’ was snapped at once.

“...Let’s go.”

“A-anedeshi? To where...?”

“Where else?”

The ‘Snow White of Naniwa’ threw the broken bamboo and paper onto the tatami, declaring with the expression of vengeance towards the stepmother who tricked her into eating the poisoned apple,

“To Master’s House.”

Shogi Home

“Master’s... master?”

“Yep. 9th dan Kousuke Kiyotaki.”

The three of us on the train, and I started explaining about Master to Ai.

“He said he went to your hotel a few times, Ai. He saw my Ryuuou match that time.”

“Erm... I didn’t have any impression on anyone other than you, Master...”

Ai sheepishly lowered her head as she sat by my left, and anedeshi, seated at my right, kept flapping her (spare) fan, looking peeved as she glared at the adverts dangling on the train. Actually, this person here did show up for my title match.

“So, Master’s master... how do I call him?”

“Um... elder master?”

“‘Kiyotaki-sensei’ will do. That brat isn’t your disciple, Yaichi.”

“...Darabuchi.”

“I say, what do you mean by that? It’s not something of praise, right?”

Please, don’t create this dangerous atmosphere with me sandwiched in the middle.

“But anedeshi, bringing her along to Master’s house is—”

“...We can’t leave an elementary school kid alone at home.”

Poor tone, but she was still thinking for Ai’s sake. Perhaps she was praising Ai for having the guts to come alone from Hokuriku. She really likes vigor and feisty.

I guessed it would be best to leave this to Master, and had no objections to this. The objection came from elsewhere.

“Master...? What do you mean...?”

“Simply, I want my Master to take over and be your Master—!”

“I-I don’t want! I want you as my Master, Master! Didn’t you say that I can call you Master!”

“Master here Master there! Shut up brat! I don’t understand what you’re saying at all!”

And so we kept yapping away until we reached Master’s house. There’s only one stop, so we arrived immediately.

It was an old styled Japanese house combining the house and the shogi classroom—master Kiyotaki’s house.

““We’re back!!””

Anedeshi and I called out in unison, going through the entrance.

Whenever anedeshi or me show up at this house, we would not say ‘please excuse me’, but ‘I’m back’, as master requested that from us.

As formal disciples for about ten years, we spent our time here honing our craft. To us, who lived in this place for longer than we did back home, this was a very significant place.

“You’re back.”

Saying that in a courteous matter of fact manner, and showing her face from the kitchen was the sole daughter of master, Keika.

It’s a beauty in her twenties, genial and kind, good at cooking, pretty, and has a hidden buxom, my ideal woman. “I want to marry Keika when I get older!” I declared this when I was younger, and often got beaten up by anedeshi. We were always fighting over her.

“I’m back, Keika!”

“Welcome back, Yaichi. Sorry about what about yesterday, okay?”

“I don’t want to say this to you, Keika, but if you don’t educate him on how to use the toilet...”

“I did so. You too, Ginko-chan. Welcome back.”

“...Yes.”

Anedeshi smiled at Keika, and rubbed her forehead into Keika’s shoulder like a kitten. Keika’s probably the only one in the world anedeshi’s willing to open her heart to, a goddess to anedeshi’s eyes.

“You don’t have to hold back too, cute lady there. You can relax here, you know?”

“Y-yes! Sorry to intrude!!”

Ai bowed deeply, and curled like a shrimp. Anedeshi instinctively twitched in anger, but it seemed she intended to go along with Keika’s forgiving presence. As to be expected of a goddess!

Anedeshi then asked everyone’s Keika.

“...Where’s Master?”

“Should be at the phone, no? He seemed to be talking to someone for a while—”

“Ginko, Yaichi. You’re back.”

Master Kiyotaki walked over, making loud thuds on the floor, and appeared before us.

Once he saw Ai, “Yep.” he nodded away without waiting for anedeshi or I to explain.

“Good timing. Please have that child come along. Keika, prepare dinner. We shall have dinner inside.”

“Yes.”

Things seemed to be developing rapidly.

“...What’s going on?”

“What is the matter?”

Anedeshi and I exchanged looks, and I prompted Ai, who was tense, and followed after Master.

The Power of Admiration

“Actually, I’ve just received notification from the Association.”

We were facing each other, seated at a table in the twelve-tatami sized room, and Master said this as he looked at Ai.

“Ai Hinatsuru-chan, yes?”

“Y-yes!”

“Do you remember me? We’ve met before.”

“During... the last Ryuuou match...?”

“Not only that. We’ve met a few times before.”

“Eh?”

“Probably when you were around two or so, Ai-chan? I visited the ‘Hinatsuru’ as a witness to the title match, and I met you when you were still young.”

“Re-really...?”

It appeared Ai had no impression of this at all, and she shrank back fearful. She was just 2 back then, so it’s no wonder she wouldn’t be able to remember it. It’ll be terrifying if she’s able to remember. Anedeshi’s the weird one for being able to start playing shogi at the age of two.

“I attended your grandfather’s wake. In any case—”

Master sat upright.

“Ai-chan, no matter how much you like shogi, you can’t be running away from home like that.”

Eh!? Run away from home?

“...”

Ai’s face paled, and she lowered her head, her fists on her knees as she shivered... it appeared Master was right.

“Yaichi, what did she say to you?”

“Well... she said that her parents were understanding enough to let her look for a master.”

“It’s obvious that there’s no way this can happen if you think about it. Are you an idiot? Brain dead?”

Anedeshi immediately told me off, but thinking about it properly, there was really no way any parents would leave a nine-year-old kid in a man’s house. At the very least, they would have contacted me beforehand.

“Besides, wasn’t that brat carrying a backpack here? Don’t you find it strange?”

...I couldn’t say anything.

“Yesterday, the elementary school graduation ceremony ended, and Spring break began. Ai-chan never returned home, and came from school to here. I heard from her parents that she had been slipping change of clothes and stuff to school, and prepared everything... is that true?”

“...”

Ai nodded, appearing to have given up on defending herself.

“But why was the Association notified?”

“Ever since that Ryuuou match, Ai-chan has been strangely passionate about shogi, and Ai-chan’s parents knew about it, so maybe they thought... so I heard.”

But I never expected them to go look for Yaichi. Ai-chan sure has some fine tastes. Master started laughing as he said that, though I did not think it was something to laugh about...

“Ai-chan, why didn’t you discuss this with your parents?”

“...Because they definitely won’t agree...”

“Not agree to you learning shogi? Or coming to Osaka?”

“...Both... I guess...”

“Ai-chan, why didn’t you discuss this with your parents?”

“...Because they definitely won’t agree...”

“Not agree to you learning shogi? Or coming to Osaka?”

“...Both...I guess...”

Ai said that she secretly learned shogi while helping out at home.

Her grandpa’s an avid shogi lover, but her parents weren’t too keen on it. She probably ran away because she just wanted to escape from her parents’ eyes and was overwhelmed with passion to play shogi. If that was the case, it’s not something I couldn’t empathize with her. People like us can’t continue living without shogi. In terms of priority, it’s 1. Air, 2. Shogi, 3. Water.

“Master.”

I sat upright, and started to explain.

“This kid... Ai does have talent in shogi. I hope that she can continue playing, so can you please convince her parents? If there’s a need for me to help, I’ll do my best to assist, I did promise her...”

“I see. I can notify the branch in Kanazawa to introduce her to a dojo—”

“I don’t want!”

Ai yelled. Her eyes were really red.

“I-I... I want to be the disciple to Yaichi Kuzuryuu!! I don’t want to be anyone else’s disciple!!”

“...Why Yaichi (this guy)?”

Anedeshi pulled me by the ear as she called me ‘this guy’. Ai immediately answered.

“Because he’s so cool!!”

“Something wrong with your head?”

Hey, Ginko, that’s too much.

“The Ryuuou match was the first time I saw a shogi match, and the players... looked so serious and so battered... the way they sat in front of the shogi board, moving the pieces, fanning themselves, or crawling on the corridor in pain.

Everything was so cool!!”

As Ai said that, I could not help but sizzle in embarrassment.

“So I want to play shogi too! I want to become... a shogi player, like Master, the first time I had such a dream, and I really want it...!”

Ai clutched at her chest, tugging at her clothes firmly.

I... felt embarrassed, and at the same time, delighted. Really delighted.

Because she saw me, the me like this, had such a match, and was able to love shogi so much.

At the same time, I was shocked. The motive as to why Ai started playing shogi was basically...

“So, you want to become a pro?”

Anedeshi asked, her grey eyes staring right at Ai’s eyes.

“...?”

“Pfue?” Ai looked sceptical, her expression like cotton candy.

“Are you hoping to become a pro player like Yaichi, and attain a title? Or become a female pro? Which one?”

“???”

“Wait... don’t tell me you don’t know the difference between the pro players and the female players...?”

“O-of course. It’s common knowledge.”

Looking at her reaction, she definitely didn’t know.

“Uu... fe-female? As in female players, pro as in male players, right?”

“Master.”

Anedeshi cut off Ai’s words, and said,

“This brat isn’t intending to play shogi, just an elementary school kid who idolizes someone. It’s impossible for her to endure the training, and there’s no need to have her as a disciple. She should return home.

“Is there anything wrong with idolizing?”

““What?””

Upon hearing such unexpected words from Master, anedeshi, I and even Ai were stunned.

Kiyotaki seemed bemused by our reactions, and said,

“Yaichi, tell Ai why you became my disciple.”

“A-at this timing?”

“It’s a great timing.”

“...”

“Master...?”

With Master prompting and Ai looking, I made up my mind, and said my motive, “...I really respected Kousuke Kiyotaki-sensei—the Master who had guidance matches at the shogi tournament.”

Ai’s widened her reddened eyes.

“Is that so...?”

“Well... yeah.”

It was a little embarrassing for me to talk about this, so I really didn’t want to say it. But...

“For me, dad and my older brother taught me shogi, and I would attend tournaments from time to time—”

I had a guidance match against Master, and I was left in awe of his strength.

“I was just 6 back then, but I still remember it. Back then, I was challenging the adults at the dojo or the tournaments at my local area, and everyone was calling me a “Genius!”, so I felt unstoppable. I thought I could beat a pro player fair and square, “So, how about two pieces handicap?”, when he said that, I challenged him to a ‘bishop handicap.’ Instead...”^[39]

“So you lost badly...?”

“No. I lost by one step.”

“Then it was a close match, right? As expected of you!”

“That wasn’t the case.”

Recalling that incident had me smiling wryly, and I continued.

“Master **let me lose by that one move**. He was worried that I would lose so badly, that I would be shocked.”

But in fact, this shocked me more than a crushing defeat.

It was more difficult holding back and losing by a move than it was to win overwhelmingly. He read my moves, and created near win scenarios, techniques that only pro players could attain.

Master’s playstyle was methodical, completely different from my old playstyle, and even I, an immature brat, could understand that. Back then, there was an excitement and overflow of emotions that could not be experienced in the dojos on the road or some casual tournament. That match stole my heart, and my heart was burning with the desire to become a shogi player like him.

“Then... after that guidance match against Master, I was more passionate about meeting him and having guidance matches against him than attending the tournaments.”

As long as I heard that there was a shogi tournament, I would head there, no matter wherever it was in Japan.

“Once I got there, I would find out if Master was there. If he was, I would immediately request for a guidance match. If not, I would not show up. Everyone was shocked by this strange kid.”

“I too was shocked and delighted by how passionate he was.”

Master gave a wry smile, somewhat embarrassed.

“And so, I asked him. ‘Do you want to learn shogi from me’?”

“And I became his disciple.”

Back then, I was only six. It was before I entered elementary school.

I did not know what was a pro and all. I was just delighted to be able to get close to Kiyotaki-sensei, and I found joy in it, so I did as he said, and followed

him.

That's why I was shocked, and that I could understand her feelings, that I really empathized with her.

"Back then, I was really shocked."

Keika entered the room, preparing for dinner, and said,

"Dad was in charge of judging the shogi tournament, and brought a boy back, saying, 'he's going to be living with us, starting today', but just two weeks before, he brought a girl back."

"Sorry..."

Master immediately apologized, and as for the girl who became a disciple two weeks before I arrived, she was giving the look of a kitty who had some food and still wouldn't approach people.

While my motive to join was 'admiration', anedeshi's motive was 'revenge'.

Back then, anedeshi lost a guidance match against Master at the age of four, and found Master's home address through the internet. Every day, she would take the train here to challenge for revenge. There was even a legend of how she could not reach for the ticket machine, and that the train station staff had to prepare a stool for her to step on.

As it was really too dangerous, Master had a talk with her parents, and took her in as a disciple.

"Back then, one reason why I took Yaichi as a disciple was because I was worried Ginko would be bored. As I expected, they really got on well and spent entire days dabbling in shogi."

Upon hearing Master talk of that hellish meeting between anedeshi and me as 'got on well' as a wonderful memory, I really wanted to refute many parts to it, but I finally managed to hold it in.

"So Yaichi became a pro, got a title, and brought a disciple today... time sure passes by quickly."

Master looked up at the ceiling, lamenting, tears welling in his eyes.

“Yaichi, I shall try to convince Ai-chan’s parents. In the meantime, she shall be your disciple, so train her and make sure she passes the ‘Training Group Test’.”^[40]

Training Group Test...so in other words, have Ai become a female pro?

But more importantly was—

“Have her as my disciple!? Not yours, Master!?”

“Yes. You shall have her as an uchideshi.”^[41]

“Uchi—”

“What does ‘uchideshi’ means?”

“A disciple who trains and lives in the Master’s house.”

I was momentarily speechless, and Master answered.

“Ai-chan, are you able to leave home and stay with Yaichi? It’ll be tough training as an uchideshi given your age, you know?”

“I can do it! N-no problems at all!!”

“Oh, a reliable one. Do your best.”

“Yes!!”

“W-wait a second!!”

I flusteredly interrupted the duo who made their decision without my approval.

“I’m only sixteen, you know!? Isn’t it too early for a teenager to be having a disciple!? Besides, I’ve only been a pro for two years, and for a guy to have an uchideshi—”

“A title is enough experience. Besides, there are pros who took in disciples in their rookie years.”

Master insisted,

“Ai-chan really worships you so much that she left home alone. It is a shogi player’s responsibility to accept her determination. Are you so determined to have a strong-willed girl wander the streets of Osaka? No wonder they call you

Kuzu Ryuuou.

“I’ll be told off as scum for taking an elementary school kid as a disciple! ...And I’m on an eleven match losing streak... I don’t have the time to take care of kids...”

“Yaichi, do you know what is ‘repayment’ to a Master?”

“Winning in that match, right? Like yesterday?”

“That wasn’t an official match, so it doesn’t count.”

Master insisted,

“Real repayment isn’t about beating the Master; that alone is not considered repayment. What Master really hopes for a disciple to do is to win titles, and raise new disciples.”

“...! Disciples...”

The master-disciple relationship in the world of shogi is really strange. Masters won’t get repaid by disciples at all, and by raising disciples, they might end up as martyrs, raising future enemies.

There’s only one reason as to why shogi players would continue with such high risks.

That they too were raised by certain people.

So, if Master insists that I take in a disciple, I can’t refuse, and of course, anedeshi can’t. It’s not regimental, but those words were more formal than any law or rule.

“...”

Again, I looked at the girl who might become my disciple, trying to determine if everything was real, from what she said about her worship of me and passion for shogi, to how they prompted her to leave home, to her determination.

At this moment, I inadvertently spotted the hem of the skirt.

There was a crease on the right side, the side of the right hand that would pick

up the shogi piece.

Once I saw that, I made up my mind.

“...Understood. I’ll take her in as a disciple and request for her to take the Training Group Test.”

““!!””

Ai’s face immediately lit up, and anedeshi glared at me with daggers.

“However, only during this Spring Break. I can take you in as an uchideshi during Spring Break, but after that, you’ll have to go back home, and you’re not going to be living with me. Is that okay?”

“So, uchideshi (Kakkokari)?”^[42]

Master... you’ve been going overboard on those smartphone games, haven’t you? So I thought...

“Don’t spend too much money on it.” Keika muttered, but I guess this isn’t the problem, right?

“But well...I finally have a grandpupil (kakkokari)... Keika! We’re going to celebrate tonight! Let’s have sekihan for today!”^[43]

“Dinner’s okonomiyaki.”

Keika, who had prepared dinner, ignored her dad’s words, and checked the temperature of the hot plate. “I see” Master looked forlorn, but he immediately perked up. “With this little girl here, okonomiyaki’s good too’. Looks like his sore loser tendencies only happens for shogi.”

“Good for you, Ai-chan. Hope we can get along.”

Keika smiled as she put the pork and egg onto the plate, and then let out a long sigh, “But this means that Ginko-chan and I will become aunties... I feel conflicted...”

“Aunties?”

“Those under the same school are like kin. Master and disciples are parents

and child, and disciples are all brothers. For me, anedeshi's an older sister, while Keika's the younger sister, so your aunt, Ai."

"...I will never accept being in the same school as that pipsqueak."

The hot plate was steaming, and anedeshi's figure was swaying on the other side. Sure looked scary.

"So, how about it, Ai-chan? Is Osaka's flavor fine?"

"Deellisshh!!"

Ai gobbled down the okonomiyaki, sauce dripped on her lips as she gave a radiant smile. She's so cute.

On the other hand, anedeshi wordlessly ate the okonomiyaki that was covered in black sauce... this person always has black sauce on her food, and more than usual today. Looks ominous...

I was stuck between those two, feeling uneasy about future developments, and had no appetite at all, putting some katsuobushi into my mouth. Salty. ^[44]

Keika broke a second piece okonomiyaki, and said,

"Will everyone be staying here today? Take turns to bathe after you're done with dinner."

"No, I still have a match tomorrow."

"You're going to lose anyway. Congratulations on your twelfth consecutive defeat. Lose badly."

"Master won't lose! Enough nonsense there, aunt!"

"Who are you calling aunt here?"

"Ai-chan, you can call me 'grandpa' here, okay?"

What do I do with this? Seriously...

第三譜

棋士紹介

◎ 空 銀子(そら ぎんこ) 女王・女流玉座

- 生年月日 2002年9月9日
- 出身地 大阪府
- 師匠 清滝鋼介九段
- タイトル履歴

| | |
|--------|--|
| 女王 | 3期(第7期-2013年度~9期) |
| 女流玉座 | 3期(第4期-2014年度~6期) |
| 登場回数合計 | 6回 女王:3回(第7期-2013年度~9期) 女流玉座:3回(第4期-2014年度~6期) |
| 獲得合計 | 6期 |



Ginko Sora

3rd Score

To the Association

“T-this is... the Shogi Association...!”

We arrived before the Kansai Shogi Association, and Ai looked really impressed as she said this.

“It’s so... so recognizable!”

“Because the words ‘Shogi Association’ on the wall are really large, aren’t they?”

From the Osaka Train Station, we took one stop down the Osaka Loop Line to Fukushima. From that Fukushima station, it would be a two-minute walk to a five-story building.

This is the location of the Japanese Shogi Association, Kansai branch-normally called the ‘Association’.

We came here on this day to apply for Ai’s Training Group Test, and also, for my official match.

Anedeshi left in a huff on the previous day, while Ai and I stayed at Master’s house. We enjoyed the piping hot breakfast prepared by Keika, returned to my house for some preparations, and came here.

“Ca-can anyone... really come in?”

“The first floor has restaurants and shop, the second floor is the dojo, and for the 3rd floor and onwards, it’s prohibited for everyone except for those authorized. Let’s go then.”

“Y-yes!”

I prompted Ai in, and she boldly took a step forward.

The door opened.

And standing right in front of us was anedeshi.

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

An awkward atmosphere lingered.

She muttered vexedly right at my ear as I passed her, opened her parasol, and hurried off somewhere. What’s with this new title...

Master’s order was that I was to have a disciple (kakkomari), but the ‘Snow White of Naniwa’ was giving Ai and me a frosty, snowy look. It’s basically Ai and the Snow Queen here.

As I was given Master’s permission, it seemed she was being more stubborn than usual.

We watched anedeshi vanish into the buzz of the morning crowd, and Ai tilted her head,

“...Why is aunt here?”

“Probably here to sign some colored paper or fans, since she’s a popular shogi player... also, don’t call her aunt in front of her.”

Or else my life will be endangered, you know?

We entered the building, and Ai squealed, running to the shops on the right side.

“Amazing! Are all these shogi books?”

There was a shop in the corner of the building, filled with all kinds of shogi-related books and goods, even signed books. If possible, please drop by to have a look.

“Woah, the shogi board and pieces are amazing... ehh!? The board needs, 1, 10, 100, 1000, 10000... a 1,000,000 Yen!?”

Wah! Wah! Ai excitedly pressed her head against the glass display, like the boy from the Alps staring at the trumpet inside the show window. The middle-aged part-time cashier lady at the cash register narrowed her eyes, looking at this cheery scene.

What left Ai most excited was—

“Master! Master! They sell fans here!”

“Yeah they do.”

Top selling items in this shop are the fans signed by popular shogi player, because when one holds them, it makes the person feels really strong!

“Woah... there’s so many difficult kanji! (>_<)”

Ai opened a sample, checking the words written on it. Those were kanji that were somewhat difficult for third graders, and she tilted her head, “Ehh?”

“How do I read this one?”

“‘A Thousand Gold in One Stride’. It means that sometimes, one move is more valuable than thousands of gold pieces, a classic saying in shogi.”^[45]

“And this? Fl...?”

“This is ‘flight’. Probably means that they hope to have a flying progression.”^[46]

“And this?”

“‘Chaos’.”^[47]

“What does this mean?”

“Erm... very messy? Something like that?”

“Why is such a thing written on the fan?”

“...Who knows?”

Calligraphy words are chosen by the shogi players, and sometimes, there are words whose meanings are only unbeknown to the person. Just to note, what Master wrote on his fan was ‘My prime shall come tomorrow’. So cool.

“...This isn’t it... this isn’t it either...”

“What are you looking for?”

“Do all the shogi players have signed fans?”

“Not all. Just the popular ones.”

“Popular ones?”

“Like past grandmasters, or A-list players... title players too basically have signed fans.”

Ai’s expression immediately lit up.

“So you have a fan too, Master?”

“Nn? Ah, yeah...”

I slipped the sample of my signed fans to the gap in the cupboard so that Ai wouldn’t find it.

Honestly, my handwriting’s really distinct.

“Scum ryuuou’s handwriting is scum too LOLOLOLOL.”

“This will be an embarrassment all the way to the later generations...”

“If it’s me, I would have surrendered my title right there.”

No way can I let such extraordinary samples be seen by Ai when they caused quite a commotion on the internet.

...Not like I could have helped it. Even I never expected to win the title... if I did, I would have practiced my handwriting more often.

“Eh... well~ there was one here. Yep, might be sold out!”

“You’re really popular, Master! As expected of you!”

“Hahaha, let’s go upstairs, shall we?”

I laughed, and left the shop.

I need to put the fan back later...

Registering the new disciple

We went up the stairs to the second level.

‘Shogi dojo’, we saw the words there, and Ai tugged hard at my sleeve.

“!!”

Ai’s eyes were glittering with expectations as she looked at me.

I could only give a wry smile.

“Before that, we need to apply for the Training Group Test in the office upstairs. Introduce you to the other staff members too.”

“Nn~!”

“You’ll be able to play immediately.”

While Ai continued to murmur, unable to wait for long, I nudged her from behind and left the dojo.

I used to be like that too... as I indulged in my memories, I went up to the 3rd floor.

The office’s at this floor, and many members of the Shogi Association were gathered here.

“Pardon us.”

“Ah, Yaichi-kun... no, Kuzuryuu-sensei. Good morning.”

Greeting me was the staff member whose face I knew very well—though to be honest, I have been here for more than a decade, and there’s no one I didn’t know. It was one of the more experienced staff members who greeted me.

When I was younger, I often angered him, so to me, he was like a school teacher, but he’s the one calling me ‘sensei’ after I became a pro player. It’s an intriguing feeling.

The staff are in charge of the running of the Associations, so in a certain

sense, they're more valuable than Shogi players.

It's fine if there are five or ten players missing, but without one of these people, it's possible that there won't be any matches.

I gave my most sincere smile possible, and introduced Ai.

"I came by because of this girl... were you notified?"

"Ah, yes, heard about it, heard about it."

The staff member glanced aside at Ai, who was shriveling as she stood beside me,

"Sora-sensei just dropped by and said, 'A pervert who tried to imprison an elementary school kid in his house will be dropping by later. Please call the police once you see him.'"

That Ginko...

"A-anedeshi sure likes to joke huh!? Me imprisoning an elementary school kid? That's impossible, right?"

"I thought so too."

"Isn't that obvious?"

Hahaha, we laughed heartily.

"And so? Who's this cute little lady here?"

"Uchideshi!"

Before I could answer, Ai answered heartily. I was left hanging.

""Eh?""

Everyone present echoed in unison.

They didn't appear to be listening, but they were... hey, someone's actually reaching for the phone. What's with this reaction? Some skit?

"U-Uchideshi? Kuzuryuu-sensei? At this age? An elementary school girl?"

"No, erm, well..."

Since it turned out this way, I guessed I could only just insist all the way, "Yes,

that's right? Got a problem with that?" I nodded nonchalantly with that attitude.

"Yep, our school's directive."

"A-ahh... Kiyotaki's..."

Anedeshi and I are rather famous for being Master's Kiyotaki's uchideshi since young, so it's not rare for me, under the Kiyotaki school, to be taking in uchideshis. Not at all!

"I have Master's letter here."

"Yes..."

"Well, anyway, she'll be staying at my house until the Training Group Test is over."

I checked the schedule of the test as I explained how Ai came all the way from Hokuriku, hoped to join the Training Group so that she could become a female Shogi pro, and that Master had negotiated this with her parents.

"Isn't it Spring break now? It's better for her development if she stays in Osaka to focus on it. Once she passes, she probably will return to her home in Hokuriku."

"Ahh, I see—"

The staff member finally seemed to have heaved a sigh of relief. At this moment—

"Eh? I want to continue staying at your house, Master!"

A nerve-wrecking atmosphere spread in the office again, and I felt anxious.

"Eh, Ai-Ai-chan. Wait..."

"I'm willing to do anything! I can cook, clean the house and clothes! If-if Master wants to... I'm willing to do perverted things too..."

Chatters.

"Heeeeeeyyyyyooooo enough with those words that can be taken for another meaning, okay!? I didn't say that at all!? Got it!?"

“B-but...’try out little girls’...”

“Kuzuryuu-sensei...”

“No no no no!! That’s just anedeshi being all petty again!”

I really, really did my best to try and explain this. I didn’t accept this kid as my uchideshi willingly!! I’m serious!!

“And besides, I like mature women like Keika; I don’t have any interest in kids at all! You know right!? We know each other for a long time already!”

“...Understood. I shall trust you on this, sensei.”

It seemed the staff finally believed my words, and the trust I’ve built up for more than ten years finally prevailed. The most important aspect of a shogi player is credibility.

Everything settled, I intended to leave the office, but the staff member gave me a grim look, one I had never seen over the past decade, saying,

“Kuzuryuu-sensei.”

“Yes?”

“...Is this really fine?”

He didn’t trust me at all~

Association's Dojo

We left the office, and Ai exhaled deeply,

“Ahh... I was so nervous there!”

“Me too...”

A single misstep would have erased my standing in society, and I was really tense. However, it's not that I didn't have a feeling that I mishandled this.

I struck first before the strange rumors would spread, but what would happen as a result...?

Well, it's pointless to be worrying about this.

A shogi player's job is to read the moves, but even pro players misread moves in matches. In the end, there are some with the 'I'll see what the opponent moves' line of thought, and would just do their best, and leave everything else to fate.

“Anyway, Master.”

“Hm?”

“What is the Training, Group?”

I barely managed to find my landing on the stairs.

“Wait... I explained a lot, a lot of times yesterday!”

“E-erm... the okonomiyaki was too yummy... so...”

Ai excused herself as her fingers rubbed on the handrail. Well, Keika's okonomiyaki's really delicious. This girl here ate three of them by herself. Did she think they're pancakes or something?

“...The Training Group is like a school that grooms pro female players, where you get to play against people aiming to be shogi players. By winning, you can increase your ranking.”

“Increase ranking by playing... it’s like a game, isn’t it?”

“Well, shogi is a game.”

The board game, invented over a thousand years ago, is the most difficult game in the world. That’s shogi.

“You start off with F rank when you enter, then E2, E1, D2, D1, C2, and once you get to C1, you’ll get the right to be a female player.”

“Once I become a female player, I’ll be able to think of shogi as my job like you, right Master?”

“You won’t get as many matches as that for a pro player, but simply put, that should be the case.”

“Then what’s the difference between a pro player and a female player?”

“It’s a long story, so I’ll explain to you next time.”

I pointed my thumb at the dojo entrance on the second floor,

“This is where you’re interested in right now, right?”

“Yes!”

I opened the door to the dojo, and stepped in with my disciple (temp),

All I saw were kids in the dojo.

Typically, most of the people hanging around at this time were old folks, but Spring Break just started for the Public Schools, and there were many young boys and girls passionate about shogi present, the enthusiastic sounds of shogi playing music to my ears.

Looking around, I saw that they were all elementary school kids? Students of the kids’ classroom?

“I want to register a ‘match record card’ for this kid—”

I was about to introduce Ai to the staff at the counter of the dojo,

But,

A group of kids looked at me in unison, and said,

“Dr-“

Dr?

“Dragon King!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

Isn't that too much of a direct translation, kids?

“An autograph please!” “Please sign this!” “Sign! Sign!” “Dragekin, let's play!”

The kids swarmed me. None of them called me the Ryuuou. They were pulling, knocking, pushing, kicking me. These kids showed no respect or concern to me, just kicking him, or making all sorts of selfish requests.

I forgot as Ai's a really good girl, but elementary school children are like this huh. But stop calling me Dragekin!

“Okay okay! Line up in a single file... no, in three!!”

I had the kids line up in trios, and called Ai, who was opposite the table. There were three shogi boards on the table.

One person to take on three—three-pronged.

“If you can beat her, you can have my autograph.”

“Who?” “Who's that girl~?”

“My disciple (temp).”

“Disciple? Little Dragon! Is Little Dragon Strong?”

“Really strong.”

“So if we can beat Little Dragon, we can get the autograph?” “How do we play?”

“How huh? Hm, let's see... no handicaps.”

I moved a swivel chair over, and had Ai sit down.

“Ai, I want you to play against three at the same time. Can you do it?”

“O-okay!”

Ai seemed taken aback, “Alrighty!” but she proceeded to roll her sleeves, and got into battle position, and immediately got ready for battle.

The first wave of trio hurriedly lined the pieces, and Ai lined up three boards worth, looking very busy.

““Please take care of me!””

They lined up the pieces, and the matches began.

I checked the kids’ record cards that were placed at the middle side of the table. It’s like a dojo membership card, a green card that has the name, dojo rank, and the recent match records.

“The one at the upper table is a second dan, and the rest are kyu ranks... now that, how many matches can you win?”

When playing against many simultaneously, it’s hard to concentrate on one, and even with a difference in ability, it’s hard to beat every single one.

However, Ai was invincible.

Typically, any kid would play whatever move they thought of immediately, and end up making all kinds of mistakes, to a point where self-destructing moves were often played.

On the other hand, Ai was holding tightly onto the hem of her skirt as she read the moves faster than anyone else. She was extremely cautious. A born player.

Compared to the kids here, her talent’s a whole different dimension.

“Little Dragon’s so strong!” “We can’t beat her...”

In forty minutes, she killed off twelve players.

I thought she would lose once or twice, but she beat them all...

“Haa... haa... th-thank you very much...!”

Once Ai beat the last person, she bowed and thanked them while panting furiously. It seemed it took her a lot of physical exhaustion as she was swiveling around on the chair, playing against them. I guess she was basically jumping

sideways while playing shogi.

“Sen-sensei, her ranking is...?”

The staff of the dojo asked me, holding a blank record card, clearly looking pale.

“Sec... no, please register her as first dan. Ah, here’s the attendance fee. She’ll be spending the entire day here playing shogi.”

Given her ability, I could have registered her as a second or third dan, but I hope that she’ll be able to experience the joy of winning matches and increasing her rank. This is my parental mindset at work as I registered this ranking.

Looking at this normally however, it’s very abnormal to see someone with the ability of an amateur first dan.

“Ai!”

I received the record card from the staff, and handed it over to Ai, who was running over to me without realizing that her skirt was being flipped, and her white panties were exposed.

“It’s your record card. Try filling it with white stars, okay?”

“...Yes!!”

First dan, Ai Hinatsuru-dono, my first disciple (temp) wrote the words onto the green card, and raised it up with both hands as though it was a treasure, giving a delighted smile.

Showing up! Silver Knight!

“Here, drink up.”

“Yes! Tucking in ≡”

I bought a packet of orange juice at the vending machine of the dojo, and Ai thanked me before she gulped it down through the straw. It’s easy to get thirsty while playing shogi.

“Fuah! ...Master, do you have any matches today? At what time?”

“About 10am or so.”

“Eh!? Is it really fine for you to hang around here!?”

“Hang around... well, isn’t there still another fifteen minutes?”

There’s basically nothing to prepare for before a match, and it’ll be awkward to sit at the shogi board way too early. Besides, it’s a four-hour long Title Ranked round-robin match, a marathon match that is to be played until night.

[\[48\]](#)

If I were to go all out right away, I’ll be likely to tire out.

“The match venue is just above here. I’ll just head there when it’s almost time.”

“Y-you can’t! You have to reach there five minutes before it starts!”

Ai pushed me from behind, trying to get me upstairs. Didn’t I say there’s another fifteen minutes?

“Ah, maybe you want to have a look at the venue?”

“Is that okay?”

“You can come along with me.”

The match venues on the fourth floor and beyond typically aren’t open to public... but the Kansai Shogi Association provides a service for dojo users to

attend official matches, and not forbid them from entering. Also, if there's prior booking, anyone can lease the match venue (with payment)

"This is the 'match board'. There's the names of the match rooms and the players of the day on the magnets."

We walked to the fifth floor, and I started explaining various things to Ai.

"Once the match ended, the loser has to move his nameplate to a lower position. This is a system to indicate the results."

"Oh..."

Ai, who had been tentative all this while, was interested in this after all. I could see her eyes sparkling.

"Master... are you at the Upper Room? Ho-how do I read this?"^[49]

"It's the Upper Tier Room"^[50]

"And the opponent is... Kami, Kami... erm, how do I read this?"

"6th dan Ayumu Kannabe. A young player from Kansai."

I was about to remove my shoes, ready to show her the room, and at that moment!



“Fufufu... this is my alias as a disguise on this word. My actual name is...”^[51]

“Y-you’re—”

I turned my head around, and standing before us was a person in white. He covered his noble-like face with a hand, making a pretentious pose, revealing a right eye with colored contact lens between his fingers as he solemnly gave his name!!

“A shogi player and a Knight! I am the ‘Silver Knight’—God Cauldron Ayumu!”

At this moment, an association staff member passed by, and greeted him,

“Ah, good morning, Kannabe-sensei.”

“IT’S GOD CAULDRON!!”^[52]

This 6th dan God Cauldron (aged 18) really seemed to insist on this name.

The staff didn’t mind, as though it was per usual. It’s hard to be a staff member if one can’t get along with such weirdos.

“Goodness... Westerners (Kansai People) are a bother. They lack grace...”

As he said that, Ayumu removed the magnet with the name ‘Kannabe’, and swapped it with the ‘God Cauldron’. Did he bring this along? Not bad...

Upon seeing Ayumu, Ai (and only her) immediately paled.

“Master! Th-that person... is wearing a mantle!?”



“...Yep. A mantle.”

“This is the first time I’ve seen one!”

It’s the first time I’m seeing someone wear a mantle at an official shogi match...

‘Hoh... little girl! Surely you have outstanding talent in shogi (taste) to notice this mantle. I cannot say that I cannot allow you to join our Kanto Knights Division.’

God Cauldron Ayumu gracefully raised his right arm, and flapped the white mantle.

He basically looks—like a noble!

The shogi world is divided into ‘Kanto’, which Ayumu belongs to, and ‘Kansai’, which I belong to.

The Kanto Shogi Association is located near the youth streets of Harajuku, and has three times the number of affiliated players to Kansai’s. Most of the title holders are Kanto players, so most of the rookies and veterans are from Kanto.

In contrast to the stylish, trendy Kanto players, the Kansai players are considered barbaric and pesky for choosing to deviate from normal plays and pulling full-scale skirmishes, and are treated as bandits.

“Us Kanto players have a delicate and fresh style of play! Young girl, if you want to learn, choose our Kanto’s style of play that seeks to hone our skills in the name of research!”

“I-I’m the disciple of the ryuuou Kuzuryuryu! I won’t give in to someone like you!”

My disciple couldn’t say my name properly.

“Fufufu... hahaha! So the Ryuuou’s (Dragekin) life shall come to an end today! Enjoy your short master-disciple relationship while you can!”

“What did you say?”

Really, this God Cauldron-sensei was able to instantly get along with nine-year-old kids, the perfect candidate to promote kids’ shogi. So you’re the guy

who spread the nickname ‘Dragekin’ amongst the kids.

I kept a slight distance, physically and mentally, from the duo who were in a mood to duke it out, and asked, “Ayumu, where did you buy that mantle?”

“Blue Mountain.”

You could have just said Aoyama. It’s not like it’s coffee. Anyway, they really do sell everything in Tokyo, huh...?^[53]

“They also sell black ones of the same style. I can buy one for you.”

“Master! You have a black one!?”

“Thanks, but no thanks.”

I showed my intent, and Ayumu looked a little dejected, “I see...” Ai too looked sad. Did they really want me to wear a mantle...?

“Hmph... whatever.”

Ayumu flipped the mantle when there was no need to do so.

“I shall be waiting for you in the Upper Room!”^[54]

“It’s the ‘Upper Tier Room’.”

Fhahahaha... he gave a pretentious laugh, and vanished. Ai looked at me.

“Master! Are you familiar with that weird person?”

“Familiar... well, we often met in the past.”

The shogi world’s a small world. Those aiming to be professionals often matched up against each other in the tournaments since young, and once formal apprenticeship begins, we would end up meeting more often at both East and West Shogi Associations.

Once we became pro players, we had to fight against the same opponents for the rest of our lives. This is our destiny as shogi players.

“Ayumu’s older than me by two academic years, but we started aiming to be pro players at around the same time, so it kinda feels like we’re classmates.”

“I see! So, a rival!?”

“Rival huh. Well, I’ll be honored if that’s the thought...”

Ayumu's in Kanto, and I'm in Kansai. While our bases are different, it's a fact that both of us strongly knew of each other's presence since young. People often talked about how we were fated rivals in our past lives or something.

But Ayumu's defiance against me reached its peak when I became the Ryuudou.

It's not that he let a rival, a peer, overtake him... not at all.

He, who declared himself as a holy knight, saw this 'Ryuudou' as a symbol of evil, a demon lord to be taken down. In other words— Ryuudou, Dragon King = Demon = Me.

Knight = Holy = Himself = I have to beat him! (` •w• ')

So it seemed. Really impressive.

"He was already someone with either some noble-like tendencies or Chuu2 madness, but it looks like it got worse when he became a pro player and had money to use."

"So he bought that mantle?"

"He's been on a winning streak recently, and the money has been rolling in. It's for certain that the winning streak and the win rate awards will be taken by him, and once he wins today's match, the chances of him challenging for the title will increase massively... I can't say that I'm his rival when I'm on an eleven match losing streak... Ryuudou's going to get taken down..."

"That's not true! You're the strongest, Master!"

—Strongest?

Every shogi player has such a thought to such an extent, or else, it'll be impossible for them to continue fighting in the world of pro shogi. Due to consecutive defeats and ridicule on the internet, my self-confidence was rattled.

However, after I was called 'the strongest', I felt some confidence rising in me for some reason. Shogi players are actually quite simple-minded.

"Master! I hope you'll win!!"

“Haha... I’ll do my best.”

With my disciple (temp) encouraging me, I could not help but give a wry smile, and walked towards the match arena where the ‘Silver Knight’ is waiting.

Start of the match

There are three match rooms on the 5th floor of the Kansai Shogi Association—‘The Black Library’.

This level is an imitation of the Edo’s Castle Black Academy (said to be an actual place), and there are the ‘Upper Tier Room’, ‘Lower Tier Room’, and the ‘Lotus Room’. Between them, the ‘Lotus Room’ is of a higher tier, a room only the high ranked could use, the most sacred place in the Kansai Shogi Association, and also the place my master peed.^[55]

‘Man Obeys Earth’

‘Earth Obeys Sky’

‘Sky Obeys Tao’^[56]

There’s the three pieces of famed calligraphy hanging on the wall, and kneeling at the only lower seat of the ‘Upper Tier Room’ was Ayumu, the collar of his mantle standing as he gracefully sipped at some red tea while raising a tea cup and saucer.

“Fuu... so the fearless fool has arrived.”

“Of course I did. It’s a match.”

I walked to the upper seat, knelt on the thin cushion, making sure I was comfortable as I took off my watch and put it on the tatami. I then took out a fan, a handkerchief, glasses, and water.^[57]

If it’s a soft, expensive cushion, my legs would numb easily, and it would be uncomfortable. An old cushion like this was more comfortable. Some players would request for special cushions from the Association when playing elsewhere.

Every player has their own habits when it comes to preparations before the match.

Some would rub their eyes, some would close them to relax, and some, like

Ayumu, would bring their favorite tea set and leaves along, and brew some tea. Ah, some would bring their personal air purifier along (anions generators). Basically, they just had to make sure that it wouldn't be too loud.

There's a long table placed by the side of the shogi board, and the 'recorder' in charge of keeping the time and recording the moves. The board set and the cushions were also provided by the recorder.

Seeing that it was time, I said.

"Let's get arranging."

"Right."

I put on my glasses, and reached for the pieces box on the board, taking out the contents in the silk bag. It's the job of the higher rank to take out the pieces from the board.

After that, we arranged the pieces accordingly.

The arranging styles can basically be classified into two different ones, 'Ito Order' and 'Ohashi Order', the latter being the mainstream. Just to note, I'm the Ohashi style, and Ayumu naturally has his own unique style of arrangement.
[58]

Once we were done arranging, the recorder told us.

"Starting first, Kannabe-sensei."

"Please call me God Cauldron."

He carried out a familiar conversation with the recorder (and naturally, was ignored). A few minutes before the match started, we closed our eyes, adjusted our breathing, and our minds were already running at full speed.

"It's now 10am. Begin the match."

""Please take care of me!""

Both competitors bow to each other in respect, and Ayumu made the first to move. He slowly removed his mantle, which he did not before the match; this indicated that it was formal clothing to him, and in other words, out of respect for the opponent. To be honest, I wished he stopped with that. It's rattling me.

I immediately made the second move.

The order of turns for today's match were decided beforehand, so I came up with a strategy at home. We played fast, and a certain formation developed on the board.

And then, it finally showed up on the board.

Ayumu moved the piece, giving a maniacal grin as he looked at me.

"Kukuku... do you think you're able to beat my iron 'citadel'?"

Isn't it just a Fortress?^[59]

"6th dan Kannabe, formation as Yagura..."

In contrast to the highly agitated Ayumu, the reporter sitting beside the recorder was calmly making a record, and it looked really surreal.

Right, a watching reporter.

It's the important match to determine the challenger for one of the seven major titles in the tourney circuit—'the Throne'. Shogi magazine reporters, and even mainstream reporters will publicize the results. There's a shogi column in the newspapers, isn't there? That's the place.

Till this point, Ayumu won every match, and by winning this, it'll be a pathway towards the role of the challenger.

In contrast, I lost every match, and it's decided that I wouldn't participate in the next Tournament. In other words, I was just there to finish the group stage.

But in the world of shogi, that's an exalted philosophy that goes,

'Even if it's not an important match to you, if it's important to the opponent, go all out to crush him'.

If I win, Ayumu's title challenge would be a mere dream that vanishes, and all I needed to do was to crush him as according to this philosophy. Besides—

"I don't want to be called Scum Ryuuou again."

I muttered, and played a Fortress myself.

Fiendish move! Kannabe-Style 1-Five-ka

Thirty minutes into the match, and we had already played forty-six moves.

The double Fortress (both sides playing fortress) formation was detailed, and the match was progressing quickly. It's common to play twenty moves or so without using the standby time, and playing accordingly, this can be played up to ninety moves. Deeply interesting, this fortress.

“Watch this—! Upgrading ‘fortress’ to ‘Bear in the Hole’! Defense up by two thousand!!!”^[60]

Ayumu held the piece as though it was Cardfight V ● nguard, and improved the defenses, sealing the jade general to the left side of the board. This is the ‘Bear in the Hole’ formation. While I didn’t know if it ups the defense by two thousand points, the formation was sturdy.

Of course, I’m not the one just taking hits.

A unique characteristic of the double fortress is that both sides would solidify their defenses and attack formations, and then a massive battlefront. Harden, harden, and explode! Something like that.

“Now then... now then, now then, now then.”

I opened the fan and covered my mouth, muttering. The formation was basically loaded, and I made sure not to let it collapse as I moved the bishop, which could attack the corners from far, to the frontline.

“Hah! Such petty tricks!”

Ayumu immediately responded, and advanced the pawn to pressure the bishop.

I played along and retreated the bishop back into the corner. This progression of actions was exactly as planned. My ultimate aim was to lure Ayumu out to attack and withstand it at the best possible moment. In other words, I was trying to lure him out.

“Very good...”

Ayumu again raised the piece as though he was doing that V ● nguard pose again. (Is that his signature pose?) “Hear my summon, leap on, Pegasus!”

The bait was effective, and he left the Knight jump to the frontline. Both sides have declared war.

This ideal situation caused me to smile.

““The knight jumps high, and is still feed to the pawn’...so there.”^[61]

“Mind calling it ‘Pegasus’ leap’?”

Once the attack starts, it can’t stop, and Ayumu’s pawns swarmed me, while I too let my pawns counter. What they call the ‘shogi skin’ was being shed, and exposed flesh was clashing intensely.

“Silver Sword! I’ll show you how sharp my blade is!”

Ayumu came attacking at me with his Silver General.

I replied in kind, cutting in with the Silver, and turned his Silver into mine. Now I get a Silver!

Normally, Ayumu would use his rook to take down my Silver General, but,

“Haaa...!”

Ayumu exhaled, and the piece he raised was...the lance!!

“Open your eyes!! This is my ultimate move—‘Rightwing Holy lance’!”

“Hm!? Thi-this is...!”

I couldn’t help but feel a chill as I watched the lance charge down the right wing of the board.

It’s an assault without any care for the sacrifices, a suicidal chain attack using the sharp lance after the silver sword!

“So, you’re planning to break through from the corner even if you have to sacrifice your piece...?”

I did expect Ayumu to use this move during my prior research.

But it’s stressful to actually be attacked like this.

“Th-this is... the ‘Kannabe-style 1-five ka...!”^[62]

“It’s the ‘Rightwing Holy lance’!”

Ayumu denied it vehemently. Whatever the name is.

“6th dan Kannabe’s, expected next move is the 1-five ka...”

The onlooking reporter ignored Ayumu’s protests, but the pen was obviously riled up.

As the name of the move would imply, this Kannabe-style 1-five was a ‘new move’ Ayumu thought of. Ayumu had been using this move to charge up the road towards the Throne match, and it’s completely different from me, who lost all my matches! (sobs)

As he called himself a Knight, Ayumu had a unique way of using the lance. I had to be extra careful whenever I move it. Also, this kasha here is read as Lance in English, so I guessed he didn’t name it on a whim. I guess.

“Hm...”

It’s easy to take down this lance, but even so...

At the moment, this move appeared in an official tournament, us Kansai players immediately began research on how to counter it. Us luring out this situation was due to our confidence in our research.

Kansai shogi being crude and a pest is a thing of a past. There’s no way we’ll lose to the Kanto players when it comes to the amount of research done!

But the Kanto side Ayumu belongs to probably did more in-depth research. There’s no way he could be playing the same move over and over again in an official tournament unless he was really confident.

There’s a counter strategy...but I really had to read this thoroughly, and make sure the moves I prepared next had no flaws.

“Fuuu.....right, now then...”

I exhaled hard, released my legs from the kneeling position, removed my glasses, leaned onto the elbow rest, and began to ponder.

I opened and shut the fan, making flapping, creating a rhythm as I read.

Reading.

Reading.

Reading. Reading. Reading...

“...Alright.”

I sat in a kneeling position again, and made a move. The recorder and onlooking reporter gasped, leaning forward.

I—did not take his lance.

The sharp lance stabbed at my flank, but I didn't bother with it, and didn't take it out.

Instead, I took down the Pegasus Ayumu moved right at the start—the Knight. Surely it was an unexpected move.

How about that, Ayumu!? While I lifted my eyes to look at the opponent.

“Fuu... such color, such fragrance, I suppose red tea is really the preferred type for English nobles after all...”

You're the son of a tofu maker, okay?

I felt uneasy as I watched him sip the red tea elegantly and call himself a noble in an annoying manner. Was he pretending to remain calm? Or did he expect this beforehand...?

Well, it didn't matter what it was. I'll be looking forward to seeing him pale once he finds out the real purpose of this move!

“...The record, please.”

“Please.”

I checked the record that was handed over to me, and I paled, for I was the one who spent forty minutes on this move.

“Ack!”

I felt that I did not spend more than ten minutes on this move. I guess time quickly passed while I was immersed into reading the time. No wonder Ayumu was drinking red tea.

The allotted time for the Throne Tournament matches was four hours per person, and I could only spend at most twenty minutes on this move. Forty minutes was way too long. He was the one who pulled the distance on me when it came to the allotted time.

“Excuse me.”

It was almost noon break, and the staff-in-charge started to ask the competitors what they would like for lunch, and they would ask for takeout delivery.

“What will you have for lunch, Kannabe-sensei?”

“Hm... well, ‘Chaos of the Phoenix and Sacred Egg’.”

“So, oyakodon.”

Ayumu would typically order the same thing for lunch, and the staff could understand despite this weird name.

“What about you, Kuzuryuu-sensei?”

“Ah, I won’t be having anything.”

Ayumu looked surprised.

“You’re not eating?”

“I think I’ll like to go out and eat.”

“I see...”

Ayumu looked at me like a Chihuahua in a pet shop nobody wanted. Maybe he was worried about the prospect of having eat lunch alone in the Kansai Shogi Association.

But I couldn’t leave my disciple (temp) just like that. Sorry Ayumu.

Noon Break

I walked down to the dojo on the second floor, and Ai was enthusiastically playing shogi.

“Oh! She’s playing.”

The record cards were placed between the shogi board and the pieces box, and the chess clock was on the other side of the board. It appeared someone brought the clock to her while she was playing, and taught her how to use it.

Her opponent’s the girl I often met in the dojo. The large eyes and short brown hair left a lasting impression on me, and she too seemed to be a kid who hated to lose. She’s about the same age as Ai, and as they’re of the same age, both of them were serious.

“It’s see...”

I sneaked over to avoid interrupting their concentrations, and observed the board.

The match was about to end, and the board was chaotic, a story of a fiery battle going on.

“...Argh I don’t understand at all! Eh!”

The opponent girl decided to stop reading as there was not enough time, and made a move. She appeared to be a straightforward one. It was Ai’s turn.

“...Like this, like this, like this like this like this like this...”

She muttered, creating her own rhythm, trying to quickly recite the moves that could allow her to win, her body swaying slightly.

—...There’s a lot of moves, but it’s possible to checkmate the opponent.

A pro player can tell from a glance, but during matches, there are some moments where

Now then, would Ai be able to figure it out in an actual match?

“...This!”

Ai reached for a piece, exhaled hard, and slammed the piece on the board, making a check.

“Eh!? ...erm...”

The opponent panicked due to this unexpected move. She hesitantly moved her king to the side right before her allotted time was about to end, but this king—was dead meat.

Once Ai made this move, she continued on without wasting much time. About three steps before she was about to win, the opponent realized the match was lost, and forfeited.

“...I lost!”

“Th-thank you very much!”

After a little breath, the girl gave a cheerful smile, talking to Ai.

“You’re Ai Hinatsuru, right? You’re really strong! Where are you from? You’re not joining the Research Group?”

“Erm... I-I’ll be taking the test...!”

“Really!? Then we’ll be able to play shogi together!”

Once the match ended, they reverted back to being ordinary elementary school kids. Such a fast transformation is really something unique to kids.

“Ai.”

“Ah, sensei.”

The girls were chatting chatting away, looking really happy, but if I kept waiting, my lunch break was going to end.

“Good work. You were able to see that mate possibility, huh?”

I put my hand on the head of my disciple (Temp), praising her, and she was grinning away like a puppy “ehehe ≡” looking really happy.

“You’re hungry now, right? Shall we go eat?”

“Okay!”

The rule of this dojo is that the winner has to bring the loser's record card along and request for recording. I looked over at Ai's opponent—

“...!!”

That girl held the green record card, being stiff all over as she looked at me.

“Erm, you. Your record card—”

“A-are you Kuduryuryuryuryu...?”

Is it that the elementary school kids can't read my name?

“Ah, yes. Kuzuryuu.”

“!!”

The girl fell off her chair, tumbled about, stood up, and walked towards me.

“Erm, I-I-I'm, erm, Mi, Mio Mizukochi!”

Mio Mizukochi, huh?

I took the record card, and found her name.

“...Mio Mizukoshi. Hm. Good play there.”

Like a teacher, I praised her. “Woah!” And Mio-chan let out a strange sound, reaching her little hand out as she trembled.

“E-erm! P-please let me shake your hand!”

“Okay. Do your best.”

“Hawawa... hawawawawa...”

Mio-chan's face went completely beetroot, her body practically heating up.

I did encounter a few moments of people wanting to shake hands with me after I became the Ryuuou, but this was the first time someone was so touched. I was so happy... but it was a little embarrassing, and the other visitors were smiling.

“I-I'll never wash this hand... for the rest of my life!”

“I-I see...”

“I'll be using the toilet later, but I'm definitely not washing my hand!!”

“No, better wash it.”

I made a note on the record card, and returned it to Mio-chan who was nodding away. “Please get along well with Ai.” I requested, and we left the dojo.

“Such an interesting kid. She’s decent at shogi too. Maybe you two will be good friends?”

“...”

“Hm? What’s the matter, Ai?”

The disciple (temp) who was still being gleeful just a moment back pouted for some reason, muttering.

“...Ai never held Master’s hand before... Ai’s supposed to be the disciple here... how sneaky...”

“Huh? Erm... Ai-chan?”

“Master!”

“Y-yes?”

“E-erm.....eh!!!”

Ai suddenly grabbed my right hand with her hands, and pressed her thumbs all over my palm.

What’s this kid doing?

“Erm... you happy now?”

“Teehee ♪”

Elementary school kids are really hard to understand.

We walked out of the gloomy building, and the sunlight of Spring was so dazzling. “Unnn!!” I stretched my back, and turned to the disciple (temp) right beside me.

“Okay, what do you want to eat?”

“Erm.. Master, do you have anything you want to eat?”

“Well, I’ve basically eaten everything the shops around here have to offer.”

“Er-erm... then, erm...”

“What is it?”

“B-bentos! I made them... so...”

“Eh? Even mine?”

“Of course! I woke up early to make it for you, Master!!”

“Oh...!”

This considerate disciple (temp)’s thoughts really left this Master grateful.

I never thought a third grader would have prepared so much... unlike that anedeshi who would just tell me to go to the convenience store (Family Mart) opposite the Association to buy lunch. Even now, she’s the same.

“In that case, we’ll eat outside then. The weather’s nice.”

“Okay!”

And so, we held hands, and went to a nearby park.

The East Fukushima Park that was slightly further up was filled with greenery... or to be precise, the trees planted by the taxi company next door filled up half the park. It’s a small, unique park, befitting of the whimsical culture of Osaka.

We sat side by side on the bench under the shadow of the trees, and opened the bentos Ai made.

“So there’s fried egg on the onigiri?”

“You don’t like this...?”

“No, I’m happy. I don’t really eat much during matches after all.”

“Thank goodness!”

Ai took the onigiri with both hands, and started munching in large gulps. However, her mouth was small to begin with, so despite munching, the onigiri didn’t look like it was going to disappear. She’s like a cute animal nibbling away. How cute.

Ai munched down the onigiri, and after a while, she lifted her head to look up

at me, looking timid as she asked.

“Master, erm... ho-how’s the match...?”

“Erm, not too much.”

I alternated between eating the fried egg onigiri and answering her question. The egg and onigiri are delicious, and there’s the salmon inside the onigiri, which I liked. Did she ask Keika?

“I played a fortress, and Ayumu played a bear in the hole fortress... ah, you know what they are, don’t you?”

“I don’t (>_<)”

“I guessed so.”

I guess that it’ll be easier for her to understand if I described it in notation rather than formation name. But even though she’s an elementary school kid, if I’m to describe the board and exchange suggestions, it might be considered as ‘helping’. I would be executed.

“Anyway, it’s a hard formation facing a super hard one. The super hard one is really solid, and even tried to attack. That’s the situation.”

“So Master, you’re the super hard one, right?”

“No, I’m the hard one.”

“Eh?”

Ai’s face froze. The fillings of the onigiri (salmon) felt to the floor.

Well, she obviously felt that the situation ‘was advantageous to Ayumu’, and it’s no wonder. He did have a really solid formation.

“Well, it’s true that Ayumu’s king is more secured, and he’s the one attacking.”

“That’s interesting...”

“But Ayumu lost quite a few pieces while trying to force his way through. Once he stops, the situation will turn around dramatically.”

“Will it stop?”

“Looking at our research, probably.”

“Research?”

I munched at the onigiri, and explained the world of pro shogi to Ai.

“If we’re talking about what shogi players do when they don’t have any matches, they spend the time preparing for the next match, do research on the opponent’s weaknesses and tactics. A genius player has a sudden idea, and made a wonderful move to win! There’s no way such a thing can happen in the current world of shogi.”

Well, speaking of which, there are some people who are god-like enough to actually do such a thing, like the current Meijin. That guy’s godly.

“That move next is actually the answer my friends and I found. This move will be able to stop Ayumu’s attacks... but this isn’t actually winning on ability, but on how precise the research is.”

“...”

Ai lowered her head silently.

Did her ideals get shattered? While I thought so, the moment she lifted her head again— “So cool!!”

“Co... eh???”

“This is the special technique you thought of, right, Master? You went through strict training, and thought of a secret move to change everything... as to be expected of you, Master! The strongest Dra... no, Ryuuou!”

She nearly said Dragon King there, didn’t she?

“But well... I see. So that’s what you think...”

“Hm? Did I say anything weird?”

“It’s nothing...”

I secretly wiped away the tears from my eyes, so that my disciple (temp) wouldn’t find out.

After the ninety or so fixed opening moves, when winning pro shogi boils down to research into every single move, ripping off moves from research

reports or shogi templates is often criticized by shogi fans. The internet too will cause an uproar over this. They're right, and I'm not too willing to play such shogi, but this isn't the era where I can simply play and win without being overly reliant on research.

At this point, almost all players will organize their 'research groups', and carry out a battle of research through computer simulation. Depending on the formation, some might even analyze until the very last move.

One move that appears in an official match.

Is supported by thousands of hands that did not show up for this match.

"So, Master, you can make the opponent surrender with the next move?"

"No, at most, it'll just be a deadlock, or maybe the situation will change slightly to my advantage."

"What? Not a super move!?"

The world isn't that smooth sailing.

"Well, the opponent's that Ayumu, and I'm second, so I guess things are going smoothly now that we're even at the moment?"

"That Go... Kannabe-sensei, right? Is he that strong?"

"He's a shogi player."

"...That sensei seems to be a little strange."

"He's a shogi player."

Most situations could be explained with this.

"Well, if I'm to ask other players how Ayumu's ability is, ten out of ten will answer—'Kannabe? He's strong. No weaknesses in openings, middle game and end game'—"

"There's no way to break through?"

"Well, it's not like he doesn't have his weakness... but I can't attack right now."

"Fue!?"

“Alright! Time to head back.”

We spoke too much. I licked the rice off my fingertips, and stood up.

“Thanks for your bento. It was nice.”

“Ehehe!”

I patted Ai on the head, and she narrowed her eyes happily, grinning away. Sooo cute.

“Keika will be picking you up in the evening, so you’ll be staying at Master’s house tonight. I’ll go pick you up tomorrow.”

“...Okay!”

Though she had some hesitation. Ai nodded obediently.

Miscalculation

“Take this——!!”

The match continued, and Ayumu impaled the lance that was stabbed at my flank further in.”

“Next, change! Normal Lance grows up into Golden Lance!!”

Promoted lance...that’s what he meant, right? He flipped the piece over, so I guess that’s right.

“Fu... caught you! Ryuuou!!”

“Who knows who caught who.”

“Ugh!?”

I saw that this attack was a feint, and ignored the promoted lance that was behind the king, took the pawn from the board, and attacked another piece on the board. As for the attacked piece, that was—

“The rook...!?”

“Right!”

The attack of the promoted lance from the corner was just to hold me off, a jab.

“Ayumu! Your real purpose is to jab at me and swing a hard-straight punch while I’m defending! That straight punch is this rook! In other words, you won’t be able to attack as long as I seal it!”

“Fufu... I see, as to be expected of you, Ryuuou, sharp observation there! However, is that feeble attack power of yours able to seal my strongest piece!?”

“How you forgotten, Ayumu!? The piece I took before noon break—?”

“!? Ah... ahh—!!”

“Come forth, Pegasus! I summon the Knight from the board, target the

rook!!”

I had an advantage on the board, and so, I too was excited, and completely ignored the cold look from the recorder!

“What now, noble? Your graceful expression has crumbled there, you know?”

“Ugh....!”

Naturally, the Rook’s the strongest piece. Once it gets taken, one’s offensive power is reduced drastically, and it’s basically giving the strongest weapon to the enemy.

Leaving aside the end game, giving up the rook to the enemy in the middle game meant that it would be a lost cause for Ayumu, so logically, Ayumu would choose to let the rook escape.

So I thought.

“Ku... kukukuku... kuhahahahaa! I’ve been waiting... for this!”

“!? ...What... did you say...?”

Ayumu didn’t move his rook, but another important piece—the ‘Bishop’.

“Bishop?”

He’s abandoning his rook!? Is he for real?

I couldn’t help but look at Ayumu’s face.

Self-destruction... didn’t feel that way. He looked relaxed, and drinking red tea.

My instincts were telling me that I should take down that rook.

Once I take it down, Ayumu wouldn’t be able to continue attacking, and I should be able to hang on, barely. I had a pawn and another Silver general in hand, no problems with defending!

So I tried to make sure my instincts weren’t wrong, and grabbed the knee of my pants with my right hand, reading.

Read. Read. Read...

“...Right!”

After more than an hour's worth of thinking, I finally made up my mind and decided to take down the rook with the Knight. How about this, Ayumu!

“Just as planned!!”^[63]

“What!?”

“I see your pale ‘Horse’ now...!”

Again, Ayumu raised the bishop with a V ● nguard-like pose, and laid it on the board.

“The name of the one riding on that horse—is Death!”

Ayumu's bishop upgraded to a ‘Dragon Horse’^[64]

“How naïve, Ayumu! I've read your attack!”

I slid my king to the side, and skilfully evaded the Dragon Horse's attack.

Activating the shogi phrase ‘King Escapes Early!’^[65]

“How about that? You can't attack again, right?”

I thought it would end up as a middle game where both sides would prep themselves again.

Ayumu reached for the pieces board, and not the shogi board. Once I saw that, I felt a chill run up my spine, like an ice pick.

“Take this! The other hidden lance!!”

The pianist-like movement of the fingers swept the lance from the pieces, and laid it on the board. Ahh!!

“Dragon Killer!! George—-!!”

“Uh oh...!”

He played this move, which made me shudder in more ways than one.

I was about to use the pawn to attack the rook, but Ayumu played a lance from behind. This would result in a nifu (foul) situation. I couldn't take this with the pawn! I couldn't defend...!!^[66]

“6th dan Kannabe shows up with a stunning new move ‘Kannabe Style 3-six ka...”

“Didn’t I just say that it’s the ‘Dragon Slayer! George’!?”^[67]

Ayumu corrected the onlooking reporter, and pointed his fan at me, saying,

“How about that, Your Highness Ryuuou? How’s my new super move ‘Dragon Slayer! George’?”

“Ugh...!!”

I bit my lips hard, and observed the board...

I want information. What’s Ayumu aiming for next? How bad is it now? What are my chances if I let my king charge through? Is there a possibility of counterattacking—?

“And just to explain, the origin of this name is from the Saint Knight George who was famous for killing a dragon. He stabbed a spear into the mouth of the dragon that was breathing out toxic air, leashed the dragon with the belt the princess granted him, dragged it along like a dog, and killed it.”

I don’t want such information...

“No! Add more emphasis on the ‘!’ at the back of the ‘Dragon Killer!’ Ayumu bothered the onlooking reporter. I guess it’s like ‘Super Speed! Black 3-Seven Silver Formation’ or such?”^[68]

It’s obviously a combination strategy that picks a target. It was obviously a Chuu2 name he came up with after thinking of it for so long.

In other words... was he waiting for this thirteen moves ago, when I took down his pawn?

No, probably longer than that...the moment he started Fortressing, he probably expected the situation to change, and lured me into that.

If that’s the case—Ayumu did research until the very last move.

Setting the Stage

“Kuzuryuu-sensei, we have run out of the allocated time. Following this, please continue with ‘one minute shogi’.”

The recorder stated the cold truth with a stoic tone.

“...Yes.”

And the voice that responded “Yes” was hoarse.

From this point onwards, every move I make has to be made in a minute, or I will overrun my time, and end the match by fouling out.

“Thirty... forty...”

The recorder read the time, with a unique enunciation in the tone.

It was 9pm.

Including the one hour noon break, it has been almost eleven hours since the start of our match at 10am.

Ayumu has one hour of his allotted time left.

And as for me—none.

“Fifty, one, two, three—”

“...!”

At the moment the recorder said ‘seven’, I made my move.

In this critical juncture, where I had no time to even head to the toilet, I gritted my teeth, and continued playing shogi despite being battered all over.

In this bitter one-sided defensive battle, the hopeless battle of attrition continued to wear at my nerves.

In contrast, Ayumu continued to attack successfully. “Now, here’s my turn!”

What was a situation of Ayumu’s advantage became a winning situation.

“Hoho. Time to end your life and head for dinner...”

There’s no rest time for dinner during the Title Round-Robin tournament, and it has been more than eight hours without rest or nap.

We’re mentally driven to our limits, and yet my mind was unable to focus while I had to play this one minute shogi.

–Where did I make a mistake?

–Was it a bad move to take the rook back then?

–...No, thinking back about it, I shouldn’t have let Ayumu play a fortress, should I...?^[69]

With the recorder prompting while reading the seconds, all I could do was just regret.

I could simply drag this until the very end.

But...as the title holder, the Ryuuou, I don’t want to do something this gaudy.

–Is it really okay for me to continue on?

–But if I’m to give up at this moment, the internet’s going to let me have it for giving up too easily...

All my mind, I was only thinking about this. I was focusing on ‘how to lose beautifully’ rather than reading the board.

At this point, I had completely given up the will to fight—the winner was determined.

It was evident to everyone else in the room, it seemed, as the reporter who was in the rest room returned to the table side without me knowing. Clearly, it was to record the moment I surrender.

–At the very least, a pretty record...

For a shogi player, a shogi record is the one thing that can be shown to later generations to indicate one’s presence. It’s as important as music sheets for a composer.

Losing doesn’t matter. I can handle it.

But if I'm going to be laughed at forever for "such a poor game", I couldn't take that.

This terrible game was going to be shown nationally.

It was inevitable that I would lose. If I couldn't avoid losing and embarrass myself before everyone...at the very least, I could leave something decent.

The act of 'Setting the stage' is no different from a samurai being a 'kaishaku'.
[70]

To go along with that move, to create the impression of **an intense match until the very end.**

This wasn't a feint. Losing heartily is an artistry for a pro player; closing this splendidly is also a skill required of a pro player.

Once I decided on this, I made my check towards Ayumu's Jade King **with my own King.**

"Hm?"

At that moment, Ayumu showed a surprised look on his face.

"Ho...I see. So you have prepared yourself..."

He muttered, sounding a little gloomy, and took my check.

To all the shogi fans on the internet watching this match through the Shogi Association's internet telecast, this is likely the moment where you would go, "Now here's a wonderful check with the king!"

Right, this was a memorable king check.

Doing this would leave behind a record of 'a bold king check for an exciting match', creating an impression of a final struggle.

All I needed to do next was to offer the head of the king. I just needed to retreat to my camp, and try to move my pieces around as quickly and beautifully as possible. Ayumu's probably able to end this quickly too.

—Just end my misery already. Please, Ayumu...

I had this thought, and was about to move my head over. At that moment,

"Hm?"

The moment I lifted the piece, I lifted my head slightly, and something that wasn't supposed to appear entered my eyes.

"...Fuee?"

I didn't know if I was seeing things, and couldn't help but let out a weird squeal.

I saw Ai.

The disciple (temp) whom Keika should have brought home to Master's house was at the arena, watching the match with the recorder and the onlooking reporter.

Now that's weird? An elementary school girl in the arena?

Were my eyes playing tricks because I was staring at the board?

"Fifty, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine—"

"—Oto!"

The recorder reading the time caused me to recover, and I hurriedly made a move.

I originally wanted to create a false impression of setting the stage, but I panicked, and made another move. 'You still want to continue?' The recorder and onlooking reporter looked troubled, but this wasn't the time to be worried about that.

Why?

Why was Ai here?

I checked the time, and it was already past 10pm. She should be at Master's house, ready to brush her teeth and sleep.

But Ai's in the room. The little feet stepped into the Upper Tier room. The elementary school kid, seated obediently between the recorder and the onlooking reporter, was watching with eyes dazzling, leaning her body over the long table, staring at the board.

“Wait... eh?? Eh, Eh...?”

I looked at Ai. Hey, you, look at me.

Ai never noticed my stare, her eyes staring intently somewhere else.

She was staring at—Ayumu’s King^[71]

Seeing her body sway slightly, I knew what she was thinking.

She was reading the board.

With her entire body, and all her concentration.

“...Like this, like this, like this, like this, like this, like this, like this, like this, like this, like this...”

It appeared that she did not notice my stare at all, merely puffing her cheeks, her ears red, concentrating as she continued to look for something.

What was she looking for? What else?

Of course, it’s the move so that I could win.

She was fully focused on reading, trying to look for the move to lead to victory through this situation of despair.

“...Like this, like this, like this like this... no! Then... like this, like this like this like this like this like this like this like this like this like this like this like this... too slow! If there’s... there’s a faster way—!”

The reason why Ai didn’t look at me was simple.

All I was looking at was my own king, and I never considered attacking. I merely lowered my head, shrinking back like a turtle, defending, just thinking about defending my pride and face as the Ryuuou. The weight of the throne bogged me down, and all I could only do was lower my head and keep regretting.

But Ai was different.

She lifted her head, and stared right at Ayumu’s King. She was only thinking about attacking, and not defending.

She believed there’s a chance to win, that her Master would win.

“...I guess.”

Such a little girl left home alone from far away in Hokuriku, came over to me, and introduced herself as my disciple. In her eyes, I’m the strongest, amazing, coolest undefeatable Dragon King in the world. Just like my impression of Master Kiyotaki back then.

Because of this, I can’t lower my head at this moment! I can’t give up!!

“Now then... how about I play a requiem for you?”

Ayumu raised the piece like a pianist, letting out an exceptionally crisp sound, playing a move that was basically prompting me to hurry up and surrender. ‘I can play along with you’.

“...Sorry Ayumu. I changed my mind.”

“What?”

I ignored his response, read the board while the clock ticked until the very end, and played a move that mixed things up.

It ended up as a situation where the King abandoned his subordinates to escape alone, a shitty, sticky move.

This was a move a pro player would not make, and would surely be sneered at by other players. It’s a really shameful move—but I chose to play such a move, and continue hanging on.

As expected, the recorder gave me a cold look, and clearly looked annoyed while recording. The onlooking reporter sighed due to the added, unnecessary work. It was as though I added to their workload.

And as for Ayumu, opposite me—

“You intend to continue defying fate... imbecile... ha!”

He pressed his hand on the right eye with the color contact.

“...Fufufu, hahahaha!! Wonderful! Absolutely wonderful! Now this is befitting of the eternal, strongest enemy of them all! Now you are worthy of being the embodiment of evil, Dragekin!”

The White Knight, ‘God Cauldron’ Ayumu laughed out loud, and with the loud

sound of the shogi piece being played, it was to be expected that he would play the most offensive move. He then clipped his long bangs with a hairclip, and leaned his body towards the shogi board.

He should have chosen a safer way to win, but he gave up that right and came right at my throat. Isn't that too cool, you noble!?

"Come! Let us continue the eternal war between Holiness and demons that has lasted since our past lives!!"

"I don't know if this will last forever—"

I replied in kind, and showed my most confident smile possible, saying,

"But I'll be willing to play with you until the sun rises.

Throne Match

Red-White Ring

Black – 6th dan Ayumu Kannabe (3 wins)

White – Ryuuou Yaichi Kuzuryuu (3 losses)^[72]

Did anyone expect this to be such an intense match before this?

At the most sacred place in the Kansai Shogi Association, the Upper Tier Room, neither party stopped moving their hands. Every move they made was increasing fast, fiery, intense, like the hearting racing.

Once Kuzuryuu ran out of time, Kannabe fought back without using his time. Truly, this is impossible to explain without logic, as shogi players of the same era refused to back down, their egos robbing their sanities.

"Fiery."

The celebrated member in charge of recording muttered, as this intense battle was decided in the end game, where Kannabe made a hasty move, resulting in the end.

“...To be honest, I was actually thinking about when to surrender all this while.”

Kuzuryuu said hoarsely when the match ended. His words were probably not a lie.

What happened that changed his mind after that?

“I wanted to struggle until the end, as the title holder... as the Ryuuou. I didn’t want to leave a poor game record behind. So I intended to break the situation. I didn’t want to continue harassing. I was just looking for a chance to surrender. But...”

Kuzuryuu lifted his head, looked forward, and declared confidently, “Even if I had to play a harassing game, it’s better than losing. I didn’t want to lose anymore. That’s the thought that changed my mind.”

It’s said that before the match, Kuzuryuu had a disciple.

When the match was proceeding, it was this elementary school girl who sat by the board, watching the match.

Perhaps it was because she knelt by the side until the very end, firmly believing that her Master would win, that changed his mind.

“Maybe. I just don’t want to let my disciple see me lose.”

The Ryuuou who’s yet to be sixteen said, and showed a stiff smile at his nine-year-old disciple.

It might be too early to declare with this one match, But this reporter dares to declare.

The young Ryuuou has completely revived. No, he shall continue to grow, and be stronger.

(Kugui)

Returning Home

“Wah! It’s so cold!”

I could not help but exclaim as I exited the association, and my body shivered. Naniwasuji, bustling in the day, was completely devoid of people; it was already past 5am, already the next morning.

The match ended at 3h48am. 402 moves altogether.

Ayumu’s body went limp right when he lowered his head, intending to surrender, and his head crashed onto the board. Thus, the match recorder and I had to lift him, moved him down to the resting room on the third floor, and put him on the bed. After that, I had to attend an interview with the viewing reporter, and thus it dragged on to this time.

“...Goodness. That noble is pesky until the very end.”

“Good work there, Master!”

Ai, who followed me out of the Association, bowed towards me.

This fellow here is excited. An energetic one.

“Ai... aren’t you tired?”

“I normally sleep at 9! But today, I just feel very awake today though!”

“When the mind’s going at full speed at high speeds due to a match, you can’t sleep because of how excited you get, huh?”

We returned home, and I started chatting away for some strange reason.

“So once the matches end in the middle of the night, some would head out to drink beer to calm their nerves, or go vent it out by playing mahjong.”

“But Master, you still can’t drink, right?”

“And I don’t know the rules to Mahjong.”

“Then how do you calm yourself down?”

“Well... like this, just walking up and down Naniwasuji in the middle of the night...”

“But doesn’t that make you look like some dangerous person?”

Well, she’s right.

We walked down, and I asked Ai why she was still at the Association.

It’s about as I imagined. Ai asked Keika, saying that she hoped to watch my match, so Keika and Master Kiyotaki discussed this, and Master agreed to Ai’s wishes, even praising her for how enthusiastic she was. Of course, it was Master’s initiative to have Ai stay by the shogi board and watch.

I wasn’t angry.

It was because of Ai’s presence that I was able to win.

“So, how about it? Did you learn anything from a pro’s match?”

“It’s really amazing! You made a comeback in that sort of situation... as to be expected of you, Master!”

“Hahaha. It was really a Super Sticky ☆ match though!”

Normally, a match would only require a single chess notation paper, but this match here needed three. I believe you can understand how much I was trying to cling on until the very end. I heard that this was the match with the most moves ever since the Second World War ended.

“Shogi’s a game where the tide can change at any given moment, and the one who makes the wrong move at the very end is the loser.”

“But, he made a mistake there... he had a lot of opportunities to win, right?”

“And that’s why he made a mistake.”

“Fuee...? Wh-why?”

“If there’s just one possibility of winning, and there’s a very small difference between them, there’s no hesitation in taking action. But if there’s a huge gap between both sides, there’s a lot of possibilities to win, and it’s easy to hesitate over which method to win.”

“Ah...!”

“With a moment of hesitation, the ‘turning point’ or ‘change’ that determines the outcome will slip in. So I played some bad moves to increase the number of openings from one to two. It’s deliberate!”

“Th-that’s amazing, Master!! You created two openings and lured the opponent into making mistakes... it’s like a pro player!!”

“But thinking about it calmly, I would be a goner if both openings were broken through (LOL).”

“That’s bad, isn’t it (>_<)?”

“Well, I won, so let’s not nitpick. I won anyway.”

If it had been the usual Ayumu, such little tricks couldn’t possibly beat him.

So I played another tactic to seal him off, to tackle his weakness, and got him to easily make mistakes.

“But a match between pro players is really amazing! One match can last this long!”

“Well, it started from morning until the next morning after all. Were you surprised to see us play so long?”

“Yes! It’s amazing how you two were suddenly shouting and saying some cool lines to each other!”

“No, I don’t normally talk that much, huh?”

It’s because of Ayumu making a ruckus. That guy’s a thorough weirdo.

Was he trying to agitate the opponent during a match? Now... that’s really a weirdo.

“Anyway, Master.”

“Hm?”

“You mentioned God-sensei’s weakness at noon, but what is it?”

God-sensei?

“...His family runs a tofu shop in Fukagawa, and he was a High School student until last month. Just graduated.”^[73]

“And?”

“Tofu makers **can’t stay up late into the night**, you know? He had to go to school, and because of that, he has to be disciplined in his lifestyle.”

“So... so that’s his weakness?”

“He did make a mistake, and that changed the match, right?”

This didn’t just apply to Ayumu; most student pro players have such a weakness.

And just to note, I stopped schooling once I graduated from Middle School, and I’m living by myself, so my lifestyle ain’t normal. I already overcame this weakness!

“Once a player turns pro, they’ll typically adjust their night lifestyle. Back then, Master used to train us disciples who became pros through overnight mahjong.”

Some might think I’m saying this for show, but the main aim is actually to get a table full of players.

To be honest however, deliberately dragging this match till midnight to attack this weakness wasn’t something to be praised.

“He’s still trying to win?”

“Terrible of that title holder to pull such cheap tricks. Scumbag.”

I guess there’ll be such criticism flying on the internet. To be honest, even I felt that it was a crappy game...

“I don’t dare to look at ‘2ch Meijin’...or ‘boujin-kun’...”^[74]

“Master? You’re shivering. Is it really cold?”

“It-it’s nothing... I’m fine...”

I knew that my gut would wince whenever I had a look at that, yet I could not help but switch on my phone and search for my name. Is this some kind of disease?

As expected, there’s quite an intense discussion on the internet, and there’s all kinds of insults directed towards me at an unprecedented speed.

And written there—

“But today’s match was rather interesting, right?”

These unexpected words caused me to stop scrolling midway through.

“Heart-pounding until the very end.” “Very interesting.” “They finally get to take a bath!” “Good work, both sides”

...I played poorer than usual.

But why were the comments more comforting than usual?

I didn’t know...what kind of shogi match would not embarrass a title holder, the Ryuuou. I couldn’t play the shogi even I couldn’t understand.

I decided to stop worrying over this, and play my own style of shogi, the good old harassing style. As long as I continue to win, I believe there’ll be someone who’ll acknowledge me, like today. Surely.

While I stopped, and thought about that.

“Master!”

Ai, who crossed the road before I did, turned around to call me.

“I want to hurry up and play that kind of shogi too!”

“...I guess.”

Seeing that pure angelic look of hers, I recalled a feeling I had forgotten for a long time.

The day dad taught me shogi.

The day Master gave me a guidance match.

The day I met anedeshi at Master’s house, and played until my nails cracked.

The day I had Master hold my hand and entered the Kansai Shogi Association

The day when anedeshi and I exclaimed “We don’t wanna go home!” because we wanted to continue playing shogi at the dojo.

The day I cheered because I was on a winning streak.

The day I cried because I was on a losing streak.

The day when anedeshi and I held hands as we returned home late at night because we forgot the time, playing too much shogi.

Such simple days of liking shogi showed up from Ai’s back.

If I could reignite such feelings again—

“...I guess taking in disciples isn’t a bad thing after all.”

Ai hopped around before me, turned her head around, and put her hand by her ear.



“Master, what did you say?”

“It’s nothing!”

I put my hands behind my neck, looking up at the sky that was gradually brightening.

I was about to reach my apartment.

Ever since I became a pro and moved out to live alone, whenever a match ended, I had a tendency of not wanting to return to that empty, cold apartment.

During my losing streak, I hoped that I could mix into the darkness of the night, just like that, and I feared the dawn, feared the next match. I once hid my shogi board in the cabinet, because I did not want to see it in my house.

But for some reason, I just wanted to hurry up and return home.

Once I get home, I would eat some stuff, take a bath, and sleep.

And continue playing shogi.

第四譜

棋士紹介

◎ ゴツドヨルドレン歩夢・子爵

- 騎士番号 329
- 異名 《白銀の聖騎士》
- 出身地 ディープリバー
- 秘技 『ライトウイング・ホーリー』
聖騎士にのみ扱い得る
聖なる槍を繰り出す。
敵は死ぬ。
- 奥義 『竜殺! ゲオルギウス』
竜王を倒すために
編み出された奥義。
竜殺しの槍を繰り出す。
敵は死ぬ。



4th Score

Daily Life with Disciple

“Sorry Master! Did I keep you waiting?”

“No. I just arrived.”

I was standing before a shop at the first level of the Association, and Ai came running down from the dojo on the second level, grinning away.

It had been a week since Ai came over, and the days living with my disciple became my daily life.

In the morning, we would bring bentos to the Association, and Ai would have training in the dojo on the second floor for the Entrance Test, while I would head to the shogi room on the third floor to attend the research club.

If both of us were free at noon, we would head to the nearby park to have our bentos.

In the evening, we would gather here again before heading home. That’s our ‘routine’.

“Ara ara. It’s like you’re lovers.”

The pretty lady following Ai down the stairs saw us meet, and showed a goddess-like smile.

She’s Keika Kiyotaki (hidden buxom), the daughter of my Master, 9th dan Kousuke Kiyotaki.

Keika’s a current member of the Research Group, doing her best for Ai’s test.

“Sorry Keika. You had to do so much, including helping out at Master’s classroom...”

“It’s fine, it’s fine.”

Keika waved her hand heartily.

“But you won’t be able to promote to C1 if you’re occasionally showing up for training, right?”

There are ranks in the Research Club.

They go from F to A, and then to S. Even the F rank, the lowest tier, requires the ability of an amateur 2nd dan.

To become a female player, the ranking has to be C1 at minimum.

Keika’s only at C2. For many years, she was unable to make the final hurdle.

“I’m already twenty five. I’m almost at the maximum age to join...playing shogi with someone with outstanding talent like Ai-chan is stimulating for me.”

Keika officially started playing in the third year of high school.

She entered the Research Group and aimed for the pros after she graduated from high school, and so became Master’s disciple later than anedeshi and me. So basically, Keika’s my junior. It’s a complicated master-disciple relationship, as complicated as Sazae-san’s family.^[75]

“Oh yes. Ai-chan, you got promoted at the dojo today. Right?”

“Yes! I’m at third rank amature!!”^[76]

“Ohh, that’s good.”

I patted Ai on the head as she gleefully showed me her record card. “Ehehe ≡” she narrowed her eyes, looking really happy. I got to reward my disciple for being so hardworking.

“Oh, right. To celebrate your promotion, I’ll buy something for you.”

“Really? Yay!!”

“Can’t be too expensive though. Has to be within 500 yen though.”

Seeing Ai so overjoyed as she dashed into the shop, even I started to feel happy.

It’s strange.

It wasn't long ago that I was envious of others winning and promoting, but Ai promoting felt as though I was the one promoting. I was really happy for her. Was I maturing?

"She's growing. Ai-chan."

Keika whispered as she stood beside me, not allowing Ai to hear.

"What do you think after playing with her?"

"I feel her getting stronger with every match... no, every move. It's because she has talent though—"

Keika said, and looked a little gloomy.

"...If only I started playing at her age."

"..."

I couldn't say anything.

The world of shogi is a world of talents. The younger one is, the faster the talent can grow.

There are people who started playing shogi in high school and became pros. However, most of us, including me, decided on being pros before we started elementary school, started training, and improved our abilities by taking on all the talented youths in Japan.

"Master Master! This! Can I buy this!?"

Ai chose a shogi piece strap (400 yen + tax)

"That's fine, but you're choosing the 'Rook'? The 'left horse' there should be luckier, you know?"^[77]

"Ahh! It's so hard to choose! (>_<)"

My disciple, holding straps in both hands, squealed in frustration. She's so cute.

Seeing her like this, Keika showed a tender smile on her face, telling me, "Yaichi, anything you want to buy for Ginko-chan?"

"What?"

What's this person saying here?

"Why do I have to buy something for anedeshi? She should be buying something for me, the junior."

"...I say, Yaichi."

"Haa~" With a long sigh, Keika suddenly sounded stern.

"If you do buy something for Ai-chan, you should buy something for Ginko-chan, you should be buying something of equal rank for Ginko-chan. If you can't maintain the situation, you'll end up in lots of trouble, you know?"

"Is that so?"

"That is so."

Is that so~?

"Ginko-chan's already fuming that Ai-chan is here, and she's going to transform from Snow White to an Ice Queen running away from home...if you make a mistake in your opening moves, you'll end up with unsalvageable failure, you know?"

"As long as I can reverse things in the end game..."

"This situation isn't applicable to modern shogi."

Like shogi, a woman's heart is hard to understand. I'll never be able to understand.

"Really... why are you people so passionate about shogi and so aloof about the opposite gender..."

"But I like you, Keika?"

"Yes yes yes."

She took me for granted!

The three of us had agreed to have dinner together, but she said, "I have to take care of father." And hurried off alone. She's probably scared that he'll splurge on game gachas if she kept her eyes away from him.

"Master? Are you going to buy another one?"

“...Nope.”

I put the ‘Silver General’ in my hand back onto the rack.

I understood anedeshi very well, so I didn’t need to do such a thing. Right.

Curry Meijin

“5-four pawn.”

On the way back to the apartment, Ai and I continue to practice for the Entrance Test, “4-six pawn.”

“5-two Silver.”

“3-two gold.”

“3-six pawn.”

“3-two king.”

“3-five pawn!”

While walking, we played ‘blind shogi’.

The passers-by overhearing our conversation were either looking troubled or surprised. However, it’s not too difficult if anyone’s ability is of a certain extent. For Ai especially, who created the shogi board in her mind, it’s effortless.

At this moment, we’re playing a fixed set of opening moves on the board, somewhat like a memory test.

“What about 2-two silver?”

“4-eight silver!”

“6-two gold.”

“4-seven silver.”

“6-four silver. Now, what do you move next?”

“3-eight rook!”

“Right! Playing the sleeve rook and attacking down the third and fourth files is called the ‘second pawn assault opening.’”^[78]

The higher ranked will take down the rook and the two generals by the corner, basically ‘sacrificial Shogi’^[79]

Basically the two openings that often encounter such a scenario are the ‘second pawn assault opening’ and the Silver Surrounding.^[80]

In contrast to a Silver Surrounding where the rook is placed down the middle and the defence is solidified before attacking, the ‘second pawn assault opening’ is more suited for Ai’s style.

But even so, defending’s equally important.

“Next, read out the moves to surround the king after this. “

“6-eight silver, 6-five pawn, 7-eight gold, 6-four gold, 6-nine king, 7-three horse, 5-eight gold!”

“So what’s the name of this surrounding?”

“Crabby attack!!”

It’s surrounding crab, okay?

“Good. You basically memorized all of the sacrificial shogi openings, right?”

“Yes! It’s easy to win after memorizing!”

“Yep.”

The growth of a disciple is the delight of the master.

My matches had been going well. I won a few matches recently, consecutively!

As the title holder, winning a few consecutive matches isn’t something to be particularly happy about, but after having gone through a miry series of defeats, the world just looks brighter than ever.

“Ai, what’s for dinner tonight?”

“I want to cook curry... do you like curry, master?”

“Oh, not bad! Let’s go buy ingredients before heading back then.”

“Yes! I’ll serve you some real Kanazawa Curry!”

We bought some ingredients at the supermarket in the shopping district, and went home to cook.

“You let me stay here, so I’ll do all the housework! Leave it all to me!!”

So Ai insisted, but I really felt awkward about it. I’m not so much of a devil to force an elementary school kid to handle all the housework.

And finally, we made a compromise to share the housework.

“Alright! Let’s do it!!”

“Let’s do it!”

Both of us stood in the kitchen. Ai’s standing on a stool to cook due to her height, but her skill with the chopper’s pretty good, as to be expected of someone trained in a hotel, more skilful than anedeshi and me. To be honest, anedeshi’s dishes aren’t considered cooking at all.

Ai showed off her culinary skills while cooking the curry.

The speed she peeled the red carrot was five times of mine, and once done with the potatoes, she started chopping the cabbage at an amazing speed.

Hm?

“...Cabbage?”

“We use cabbage as a side dish for Kanazawa curry.”

Curry with cabbage... sounds like it works? Sounds like it’ll be refreshing when eaten.

The thinned ingredients were fried, and thrown into the work. Blurp blurp.

We continued to solve tsumeshogis while waiting for the ingredients to stew for a certain time (some of the ingredients got burned).

After that, pour the curry in, and it’s done!

So I thought, but,

“Hm...”

Ai frowned, narrowing her eyes as she stared inside the brown wok, looking more serious than when she was solving tsumeshogis.

“...The color of the curry block bought at the market is too dilute, I guess.”

“Eh? It should be this kind of color, right?”

“No, has to be blacker.”

...Blacker?

“Master, do you have any sauces here?”^[81]

“Eh? Y-yeah... it’s Osaka, so sauce is a necessary ingredient in homes.”

“Okay.”

“Wait!? Why are you adding it into the curry!?”

Ai added an unbelievably large amount of sauce into the curry, and stirred it.

The originally golden brown curry immediately became a black brown.

“Goody♪ This is the kind of color that can increase appetite.”

“ ... ”

Really? Is that really the case?

Ai then lowered the flames, and kept stirring the curry. She’s not just stirring the ladle to prevent burned stuff at the bottom of the pot; she’s using it to **squash** all the ingredients. Sweat’s showing on the little forehead; I didn’t know you could make curry this way...

“It-it’s about done now, right?”

“No, it’s not mushy enough...”

“Eh? Mushy?”

“We have to stew the ingredients until it’s all sticky and gooey, until we can’t see the shape... I guess it’s not mushy unless it’s done with a pressure cooker gayo... and not nice looking if it’s not stainless silver gaine...”

“???”

Gayo? Gaine?

What do I do? My disciple’s saying weird stuff.

Ai started to mutter her thoughts out, “Un!” But it seemed she found it

acceptable, nodding.

“Looks like this is the limit! Let’s eat!”

“O-ohh! Let’s eat, let’s eat.”

Ai served the rice on the plates, poured the curry gravy on them, laid out the pork fillet bought from the supermarket and cabbage, before flavouring them with sauce. This pork (victory) curry was made to pray for good luck to a player, and really was a delicate act of kindness from my disciple. She’s a natural competitor.^[82]

As for what she was holding, a fork of course.

“Eh? Eating with a fork?”

“Yeah?”

“Don’t you normally use a spoon?”

“No way~ master. Curry has to be eaten with a fork!”

“Re... ally?”

“Yes!”

Oh, I see. Ahahaha, just felt that something’s strange here, but I still clapped my hands together with my disciple, laughing away.

I was wondering if a fork could scoop curry, but as the gravy was extremely thick, there was no problem.

And then, I put the curry into my mouth—

“Master.”

“Hm?”

“**Pull** yourself together, okay?”

What?

I was wondering about her strange words, and my hand that stopped continued to put the curry into the mouth. The flavour of the curry spread in the mouth, and seemed unexpectedly sweet.

And then, the spiciness,

Caught
Up

To

Me

“..... Ah..... eh...?”

The sound of the fork dropping onto the table caused me to wake up.

It appeared I passed out without removing the fork from my mouth. The curry that was oozing steam had become lukewarm, and there was a thin layer on it.

“Ho-how long... have I been like this...?”

“Fufu.”

Ai was already done eating the curry, her elbows on the table as she cupped her hands on her cheeks, looking at me, showing a deep, meaningful smile as unpredictable as this curry...

And then, I started gobbling down the curry, as though I was possessed by something. I did not pass out like I did the first time, yet the hand holding the fork could not stop. I ate a mouthful, and then another mouthful, until the black color of the sauce vanished from the bottom of the plate.

I was done.

A delightful, unprecedented sensation engulfed me.

What’s this... it’s different from the curry I had before...

“Wh-what is this... did you add cannabis in...?”

“No way, I didn’t add such a thing in. Huhuhu.”

“I want... I want this tomorrow... two days later too... I want this every day...”

“Yes! I’ll make it more delicious tomorrow ♪”

After trying such a taste, would I be able to go back to the original taste...?

“Wh-what about the dojo? Made any friends there?”

After finishing the curry, I gulped down some water to suppress my heart, asking how my disciple’s doing. What’s with me being shocked while eating curry...

Ai, giving a Buddha-like smile, suddenly frowned.

“...”

“What?”

“...Master.”

“Hm? What is it?”

Did she get bullied at the dojo? It's common for everyone to gang up and attack a super strong rookie. Back in the day, there were groups to 'defeat Ginko Sora'.

To prevent this from happening, I had Keika accompany her...

“Erm... well...”

Ai seemed to have made up her mind as she stared at me, giving me an unexpected confession.

“C-can we? Can we have the Research Group here?”

“...Research group?”

“Yes!”

Again, Ai lowered her head, stammering as she had difficulty saying out the reason.

“A-actually, erm... I talked about how I ended up at master's house, and everyone...”

Want to know where the Ryuuou (dragon king) stays! I guess it probably ended up this way.

What. So that's how it is.

“Of course! You don't have to worry about this.”

“Th-thank you... master!!”

“Hahaha, just ask if you need anything, whether it's the shogi board, pieces or clock.”

Thud!

I smacked my chest, assuring my cute disciple.

At this moment, I did not understand what would happen if I invited elementary school girls to my house for a research group.

Not yet, at this moment.

JS Research^[83]

“(Nervous, nervous).”

“Master, everyone will only be here in an hour.”

“Oh, I-I see.”

On the day of the research group.

As the disciple’s friends were to arrive at my house, I was so tense right from the morning.

There would be three others coming, two of the same year as Ai, and said to be in the Research Group.

Ai prepared sandwiches for everyone, and she watched me sit in front of the seven-inch board, asking with a bothered look, “Master... why are you dressed in a suit at home.”

“Ah, should I be wearing Japanese clothing?”

“You could be dressed normally...”

“Is everyone late? Did they get lost?”

“It’s not time yet.”

“I guess I should head to the station to meet them—”

Right when I was about to get up.

Ding dong♪

“Ah! They’re here!”

Ai hurriedly removed the apron, and ran off to the corridor.

I sat down hurriedly, laying out a shogi book before the thick seven-inches board, giving a ‘this is how I always do my research, got a problem?’ look. Actually, I would typically use a board that wouldn’t cause too much sound.

““Please excuse us!””

Energetic greetings came.

The two girls followed Ai in.

“I-it’s beep a while! Mio Mizukoshi! Th-thank you for welcoming us!!”^[84]

“Hello. I’m Ayano Sadatou. Please take care of me.”

One of them was the athletic girl I met at the dojo, Mio.

The other was someone I met the first time. Ayano’s a tall, princess-like girl.

“Same here. Thanks for taking care of Ai all this while.”

I knelt down before them in a seiza, greeting them, “Kya!!” “He called Ai by name!!” The two of them seemed extremely excited for some reason. “I-I’m the disciple! It’s normal! Really!!” Ai’s blushing. What’s going on?

I couldn’t get how elementary school kids think... and while I was feeling uneasy— Plomp.

A cute looking small blond girl with green eyes suddenly popped out behind Ayano, and hugged me.

“Shaottozuuu!”^[85]

...Eh?

“Charlotte Izoal.”

Ayano helped to translate.

“She’s a first grader French girl studying in Kyoto. A student of our master.”

“Exchange suudent!”

What’s with this super cuteness? Why did I feel my heart race?

I let Charlotte hug me as I suppressed this faltering in my heart, and asked, “M-Mio and Ayano are both students at the research group, right? Who’s your master?”

“Kuresaka-sensei!”

“Kayaoku.”

Masters are basically families to them, so there's no need for honorifics when introducing them. Mio still did not have such a habit, while Ayano was already properly trained in this. This showed their personalities. However interesting.

"Kayaoku-sensei... so you know Kugui, Ayano?"

"Yes, I'm her junior^[86]. Sister Machi often talked about you, Kuzuryuu-sensei. She wanted me to bring this along."

Ayano handed me a paper bag of Kyoto sweets.^[87]

"And this is from my family."

"Ah! Mi-Mio's family too want to give you something too."

"Char too?"

Besides the Kyoto sweets, I received cookies and Madeleine. Charlotte's gift was a magical face "This is from Char!"

I would serve the gifts I received at afternoon tea, but at this point, the most important thing, was shogi.

There's various ways of holding a research group.

There are research groups that specialize in-depth research into certain formations, or verbally discussing current trending shogi matches without playing shogi matches, or researching on the local gifts that had nothing to do with shogi at all—

Of course, the mainstream style would be actual games. Research members would play a few rounds for a day, and then everyone would gather and discussing their views.

There are of course various times to them.

There are those that gather at 'training stables', called 'training stable research group', those that gather at Abeno Harukas, called the 'Haru research group', the one that like to drink beer called the 'Heineken research group', the one from Tochigi who gather together to form the 'Tochigi research group', and so on.^[88]

This research group's full of elementary school girls, so it's called a 'JS

research group'. Some legend this is...

"All the tools are here. You can use them if you want."

There were two shogi boards with legs, chess clocks and notebooks (most of them time, we don't use shogi paper to in the Japanese room, but ordinary notebooks!) in the Japanese style room, and they could start immediately—so I thought...

"Erm... Master... Char..."

Ai looked over at Char in a sorry manner.

...As she's too small, the shogi board blocked her completely. I guess I messed up by preparing a larger board.

"Hm... do I get a chair for her?"

"Stack the cushions?"

Ayano intended to hand over her cushion, but the cushions in my house were so thin, it's pointless to stack them.

"She can't sit in a seiza yet, can she? Maybe we can use the stool Ai uses when she cooks—"

I was about to stand up, but a little hand grabbed my shirt.

"Masu."

"Hm?"



“Sit, here.”

Fueh!?

“Masu, leggings, sofee.”

“Woah, woooh, awawawwawawa...”

“Sit, play, shogi~”

Char climbed onto my knees while I was sitting in a seiza. It seemed she was saying ‘I want to play while sitting here’.

What’s with this adorable creature?

She’s really cute, huh? She keeps calling me ‘Masu’ (master). What the heck, is this girl an angel?

Of course, I’m not a lolicon.

I’m definitely not a lolicon. I do like older sisters; there’s no way I can be a lolicon.

But... what’s going on? What’s with this sweetness piercing through my chest!?

“O-okay. Now then... le-le-le-let’s play shogi with this big brother, o-okay...?”

“Let’s sho-gi~”

Tak, tak, the angel seated on my knees laid the pieces with her little fingers.

“Tak! Tak!” And the enthusiastic sounds of shogi being played seemed to overpower this cute voice.

“Ai, don’t trouble the neighbours by making so much noise.”

“Yes!”

“Thuk!!” I told you not to be so loud.

Ai was blushing, her cheeks puffed as she faced Mio, looking very amped up and playing with much more intensity than usual, maybe because her master’s beside her.

“Char, why did you want to play shogi?”

“NARUTO!”

“Huh?”

“The manga ‘Naruto’ has a scene of them playing shogi. I heard that she got interested in shogi because of it.”^[89]

...Was there such a scene?

I felt uneasy, but Char did play a decent game, despite her arms being unable to reach the corners of the board. It appeared she was at Amateur third grade.

“Masu, help me pick the piecy.”

“Here.”

I helped Char pick a piece, and our teamwork’s flawless. The playing sound got more agitated beside me, probably since it’s at end game.

Once the first game’s over, we had a short post mortem, and this time, there’s a swap in matchups.

So the matchup’s Mio vs Ayano, and Ai vs Char.

“Do your best, Char.”

“Okay!”

“...Master’s dachibuchi.”

Again with that. What does that mean anyway?

Ai played with more vigor, and thoroughly crushed Char. The angel on my knees, was on the verge of tears, and I was utterly terrified.

Beside me, Mio let Ayano move the king, and was cupping her head her head as she watched the board.

“Ah, finasshed.”

“Finasshed?”

“Ah, she ran out of moves.”

Ayano explained.

Ran out of moves -> Finished -> Finasshed.^[90]

Good thing someone knows.

“Hey, Ayanon, who’s the best shogi player of all the characters? I guess it’s ‘Sho-Chan’ (Official mascot of the Japanese Shogi Association), right?”

““Kumamon has a first grade too.”^[91]

...Mio and Ayano are enjoying themselves, aren’t they?

Endless Shogi

The fun research group soon lasted till night.

“It’s about time for you girls to head back home, right?”

I hug Char, who’s on my knees, asking reluctantly.

“Ah, it’s fine.”

Mio brought her bag over, and unzipped the bag.

“I brought my pajamas and toothbrush.”

I wasn’t asking about that.

“No no no... this isn’t fine, you know? Your families won’t let you live outside, you know?”

“They say it’s fine if it’s with a pro-sensei.”

“Sister Machi said that I should use this opportunity since there aren’t many chances to live at the ryuuou’s house.”

“Char wants to stay too!”

“.....Ai.”

“I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry!!”

My disciple grovelled onto the floor in apology, her head nearly digging into the floor.

Looking at this, it appeared they had intended to stay here the entire time.

“...Whatever. At the very least, let me talk to your families. Give me your phone numbers, okay?”

““Yay!!””

I dialled their families one by one, and they did get their families approval. Looks like parents are increasingly understanding about shogi recently.”

At the same time, I sent Keika a message.

““Save me! Ai had three friends who wanted to stay at my place! My house’s a kids palace, what do I do now!?’ ...so”

Hohoho. If Keika came by, our relationship would definitely improve.

Once Keika touches Char’s pure innocent cute self, “Ahh...I want such a cute kid too...where’s my prince charming...that person who’s strong at shogi, dotes on me, will have a prominent social standing, the one who has one of the seven titles...” well, that’s me!!

“Right, Ai. You’re not preparing dinner?”

“There’s curry in the house.”

Can’t let them eat that.

“L-let’s order takeout, shall we? Is pizza fine!? Or sushi!? Eel!? Anything’s fine, okay?”

“Char wants tacoyaki!”^[92]

This angel ordered takoyaki. I obliged, and went out to buy takoyaki.

With four girls gathered, dinner sure was rowdy.

“Nom nom... Mio feels that moving 2-one rook should be the right move.”

“That’s what I first thought, but it’s wrong. What do you think, Ai?”

“I read that move too... what if it’s 3-five horse instead...”

“Woah!?” “That’s amazing!?”

“After 3-five horse, it’s 2-four rook, same with horse, and at 2-five rook, rook at the same place, and then the knight, followed by 4-four bishop...”

“For forrr!”^[93]

Instead of hearing of any girls’ manga or popular topics amongst elementary school girls, I ended up hearing shogi notations. They could chat about shogi, since they couldn’t talk about it that easily at school with their friends, or their families, so there doesn’t seem to be an end to the talk.

After dinner, everyone began to play shogi again.

They kept playing shogi from morning to night. If I didn't stop them, it's likely that they would never stop.

I saw that it was time to stop, and suggested to the girls who're doing post mortem.

"Let's stop playing shogi for now. Time to bath."

""Okay!!""

The four answered, and lined up to play shogi again.

Hey, what are you girls doing, so I wanted to ask—

""We're deciding the order to go bath!""

After that, they played for another two matches, and finally went to bathe willingly.

Once they're done with their shower, they continued playing shogi again, non-stop.

"It's time to stop. Go to bed."

""Okay!!""

The kids enthusiastically answered, and started playing again.

I wanted to ask what they're doing—

"We're deciding on the order to brush teeth!" "We're deciding the order to use the hair dryer!" "We're choosing where to put the futons!"

There's no end to this.

...But I did do such things before, and I didn't have the right to tell them off. Anedeshi and I were like this, always deciding things with shogi.

But if I don't let them sleep... while I was thinking—

"Sensei, can I ask you for something?"

"Hm? What is it, Ayano?"

"It's a rare chance, so we hope to have a guidance match against the ryuuou."

"Fine... but go to sleep after you're done, okay?"

I too wanted to test the results they learned for the day. Perfect time for the request.

We laid out the futons in the Japanese room, and laid out the shogi boards in a fan shape on the futons, and I had a guidance match against four of them. Char's seated obediently before the futon, looking extremely cute.

"The handicap?"

"Four... no! Two please!" "Two." "M-me too!"

Finally, it's decided that I play a two-piece handicap of the rook and bishop against Mio, Ayano and Ai, and a six piece handicap to Char with only my king, gold and silver generals.

Through the guidance matches, I could determine everyone's personality.

There were pros that wouldn't give leeway, and some who played losing shogi to build confidence in the opponent. Some even choose to lose once the proper order of moves were made, but would crush the opponent if it's a challenge.

There were some who're normally docile, only to become passionate duellists while training. To someone like me, who went through the cool, relaxed education era, I might feel 'is there a need to be so hot blooded'?^[94]

Leaving aside someone ranked like Char, I never deliberately lost to anyone with a dan, only to be more intricate during the post mortem.

The trio with two piece handicaps lost terribly, and I affirmed my objective.

"Mio, your attacks are forceful, but it'll be better if you can change your habit of ignoring the balance of your formation and charging directly. It's good to take the initiative on offense, but don't leave your pieces isolated, understand?"

"Y-yes! Thank you for your guidance."

"You have decent skill, Ayano, but you can be more daring. You're talented, and I believe you can try all sorts of moves. Do your best!"

"I-I'll do my best!"

"Ai, you're too sloppy in your moves. One more match!"

"Yes! I won't make a mistake again!"

“I’m expelling you if you make the same mistakes.”

Seeing Ai and I line the pieces again, Mio asked with a shocked look.

“Er-erm... didn’t you say we’re to sleep once we’re done with the match...?”

“You can go sleep if you want!!”

“Hii!!”

“If you want to be stronger, you have to play against strong opponents. Ai, you want to get stronger?”

“I want to!! Please guide me along!!”

Seeing Ai bow, the other girls lined up their pieces too.”

“Mi-Mio wants to get stronger too!” “Me too!” Char hasu be stronger!”

“Okay everyone! We’ll start with an all-nighter ten guidance matches, let’s do thisss!!”

“““Alright!!”””

After that, we kept on playing shogi.

Disastrous Morning

Snap, snap.

Such noises awoke me.

“...Hm? It’s... morning already...?”

We kept playing shogi until we slept, and we ended up sleeping in the Japanese room. Char’s innocent sleeping face was before me, her little hand tugging at my shirt.

I touched the angel’s cheeks with my fingers, the feeling of blissfulness instantly filling my body.

“...Is this love...?”

The moment I said these words from my heart, ‘snap’ another sound, so I turned towards the direction of the sound, and found anedeshi standing there with cellphone in hand.

“A-anedeshi? Wh-what are you...doing?”

“Taking photos as evidence.”

“wait.”

Wait—this is a misunderstanding—before I could excuse myself, anedeshi was already taking photos on the cellphone.

“This is the birth of a new title ‘loli king’ in the shogi world... I’m going to send this to everyone related to the shogi world through LINE.”

“Stooooooooooooooooopppppppppppppp!!! Please don’t send this out!!!!!!!”

This will be an eternal mark in history! Everyone’s going to call for loli king forever!!’

“This is a research group! We’re doing research!!!”

“A research of young girls?”

“Nooo! Not a research of young girls, researching with young girls! This distinction’s important!!”

“Aren’t they all lolis anyway?”

“That’s actually what I think!!”

I couldn’t deny how terrible a situation I was in, which was why I was feeling anxious.

“But why!? Why are you here, anedeshi!? There isn’t any VS arranged, right —”

“Keika notified me and said you sent a message, Yaichi, ‘i had three friends who wanted to say at my place! My house’s a kids palace’, and wanted me to check things out as she sensed something criminal.”

“Keiiiikkkkkkkkkaaaaaaaaaa!!!”

I sprawled onto the futon, and cried out in agony. Mio and Ayano rubbed their eyes as they got up, and opened them.

“Uhhh... eh!? Wawawahhh!! So-Sora-sensei!?”

“I-it’s for real! It’s the real Snow White!!”

“...”

Anedeshi looked at the kids impatiently, but she didn’t lash out loud. Actually, she’s ‘super’ shy, even awkward around kids. Without shogi, her communication skills are basically zero. It’s common to see such people in the world of shogi.

Mio and Ayano were excited seeing the highly respected double female title holder standing before them early in the morning, and they enthusiastically requested to shake hands and sign an autograph. Anedeshi wordlessly shook hands with them.

Ai and Char woke up. “Ah, aunty’s here!!” Ai blurted before she was wide away, and Char wiped her drool on anedeshi’s clothes. At this point, the Snow White finally caved in.

And so, this stress—

“Scumbag loli king... go and die already...”

“...Yes. I’m sorry. I’ll die. I’m sorry.”

Anedeshi vented on me. Yes yes, I’m done. It’s all over.

On anedeshi’s request, the JS research group was disbanded, ‘retrain your endurance, and starting tomorrow, practice shogi at the association for three days straight’, so she demanded of me. The training camp for the elementary school kids ended abruptly.

“Can we come back again?” Mio asked me with an innocent look before she returned home, but all I could do was to show a vague smile on my face.

第五譜

棋士紹介

◎ 清滝桂香(きよたき けいか)

- 生年月日
- 出身地
- 師匠
- 所属クラス
- スリーサイズ
- 得意戦型

11月9日

大阪府

清滝鋼介九段

研修会C2

B95 W62 H92

居飛車党で、角道を止める
じっくりした将棋が好きです。
でも相矢倉は細かすぎて
わかんない(/_;)



5th Score

Day before the Test

“I heard that USJ will be building a new attraction.”^[95]

I could hear anedeshi’s voice and electronic sounds inside the shogi room of the Association’s third floor.

Pi... pi, pi, peep.

“Oh.”

Pach. Tak! I carelessly answered as I moved my piece, and pressed the switch of the chess clock.

We had fifteen minutes of allocated time each. It’s a practice match where if the time ran out, we had a time limit of thirty seconds.

“I heard the girls discuss this in class. Heard it’s fun.”

Pach. Tak. Anedeshi quickly moved her piece, and pressed the switch of the chess clock.

It’s the period after the ranking matches ended, a long Spring Break for the shogi world. There were few matches, so Anedeshi and I were the only ones in the shogi room. It’s the third day of the punishment-like, supplementary lessons-like practice matches.

“Hm...”

I moaned as I made a move. We’re talking, but the purpose was to pace ourselves; we weren’t paying attention to the conversation at all.

Speaking of USJ, Anedeshi and I would rather head to a street dojo or a KTV to play shogi. We get to eat and drink in the dojo, and nobody will protest no

matter the loud noises made; it's the best place for us to play shogi, and I had no issues with playing shogi there for the night.

"About tomorrow..."

Pach. Tak.

"What?"

Pach. Tak.

"Yaichi, do you have any plans?"

"I have nothing, personally—"

Both of ran were playing with thirty seconds. I read her move, and lazily answered,

"But it's my disciple's Research Group Test tomorrow."

PACH! BAM!

Anedeshi made her move, and let out a loud thud. The clock wasn't wrecked though. She's pumped up for this.

"...So?"

"No, well, I thought I should accompany her."

Pach. Tak.

"Aren't you being too overprotective?"

"You're right. Our Ai here should be able to enter the Research Group easily."

"..."

Anedeshi's hand stopped as it reached for the shogi board, and she was clenching her fists. The countdown began.

"I do have a responsibility to take care of her, and I don't have anything to do at home anyway. I can't think of any other places to go to, and even so, I don't have anyone to go with (wry smile)."

"..."

Pi, Pi, Pi—

“But in the end, I really can’t get sick of looking at my disciple when she’s so cute.”

Piiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii—

The chess clock let out a loud warning.

Time’s up.

“Erm... Anedeshi? Time’s up...”

“I know.”

Anedeshi nonchalantly stood up despite losing due to running out of time.

I understood what this meant.

At this point... Anedeshi’s utterly fuming.

What happened? Did I say something to anger her? I just mentioned my schedule for the next day...?

“Anedeshi? Do you have anything tomorrow?”

“Work.”

Once she coldly said this, the proud Princess left the room.

Work on the weekday? Some event for the Women’s Shogi Association? I thought she would put shogi studying as priority, and wouldn’t participate in such events often...

“Well, it’s useless to be wondering about it.”

I packed up, and left the room too.

I arrived at the dojo on the second floor, and saw Ai ask someone to record the match result.

“Ah, master!”

“How’s your record today?”

Ai grinned as she raised four fingers. Four straight wins, huh.

I guess it’s ideal that she kept this winning feeling up. There’s still some time to noon, but since it was the perfect timing, I decided to end things here for the

day.

“Let’s have some pork fillet at ‘Twelve’ before going home.”

“Wahh!! Eating out!”

I intended to head to the Restaurant on the first floor of the Association for our meal to cheer her on, but once we got down, some people entered the hall.

A middle-aged man and woman... probably younger than that, a couple.

They were dressed formally. I might be rude to shogi fans here, but they did not seem to be the type who would show up at the dojo to play shogi.

“Hello, how may I assist you?”

Shogi players are basically in the service industry. I showed a gentleman’s smile, asking them.

They widened their eyes as they looked at me.

But once they saw the disciple climbing down the stairs behind me, they were left stunned, and cried out in unison, ““Ai!””

And so Ai, who was called out—

“Papa!? M-mama!?”

...Eh?

Ai's Parents

It's a man with the flair of an ancient warrior.

"Takashi Hinatsuru."

We're in the restaurant 'Twelve', on the first floor—

Unlike their energetic daughter, the parents facing me from across the table were giving off an ominous atmosphere, so heavy that it's terrifying...

"...Papa's the chef at the inn."

"...Oh."

Hina, seated next to me, whispered.

This 'professional' looking father sure seemed similar to Master Kiyotaki in some sense. Of course, I'm not talking about how he peed through the window of the arena. Well, it's the presence they carry, I guess?

"Kuzuryuu-sensei, thank you for your great support during the Dragon King match."

"I-it's nothing. I too, want to thank..."

"I was in the kitchen, so I apologize for neglecting to greet you. Congratulations on being the youngest Ryuuou in history. And my daughter here has caused you trouble. I really do not know how to offer my sincere apologies."

He bowed deeply, and I couldn't help but wince. It just felt awkward, like I'm letting master apologize to me...

But the really awkward part came later on.

"Akina Hinatsuru."

Following that was Ai's mother.

"I am the lady boss of 'Hinatsuru'. *We have been in your care along with the*

many people of the shogi world during the Dragon King match, Kuzuryuu-sensei."

The lady boss was a beauty, of the exact same mold as Ai... but with manners and an ominous presence. Her words were filled with spite, and a chill ran up my spine.

The final round of the Dragon King match which I won my title—

The match was held over two days, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Every person involved in Japan who deemed shogi to be more important than Christmas, and participated in the final title match of the year.

There was no way the celebratory part would not be a mess.

"I am... shogi!!" My drunk master suddenly said such ridiculous words, and for some reason, started stripping his bathrobes and went fully naked. I too was completely stripped naked, and the young shogi players of Kansai who came to support went out to the hall completely naked, playing naked shogi. The reporters who came to telecast excitedly uploaded the footages onto the internet, and created a massive commotion^[96].

I didn't want to remember about this terrifying memory, and more so the staff at the inn... it just remained fresh in my mind.

And to bury this unbearable memory, I laughed, saying,

"S-since both of you are here, do you want some food? I personally recommend the 'Pork Beauty'."^[97]

I opened the menu, and introduced a dish to them.

This Pork Beauty is a self-creation of the shop owner. It's pork with a thin deep-fried layer and coated with sweet and sour sauce, a rather delicious dish. It's a weird name, but I personally liked it. Also, I heard of other self-created dishes like 'Dynamite', but due to the weird name, I didn't remember ordering it.

"I wish to order the lunch set 'One mouthful of lean pork'. What about you?"

"The same."

"I-I see... what do you want, Ai?"

“Butter rice!!”

In the end, I was the only one who ordered the Pork Beauty. It’s nice... but the problem here’s the name, I guess...?

Later, the food arrived, and everyone other than Ai finished the food, and went back to the topic at hand. Ai got down to eating the butter rice, but she just could not finish, either because her mouth was too small, or that there’s too much butter rice. Please take your time...

“About accepting our daughter as a disciple...”

Her father said as he wiped his mouth with a napkin.

“After a long discussion and thought through this, we have decided—to oppose. We apologize for causing your so much inconvenience, sensei.”

“Hnnn!!! Momomomo!!!”

“Ai, do not talk while you eat.”

Ai, upon being told off by her father, started to gobble and stuff the bitter rice into her mouth. Do your best there.

Twelve’s pork dishes might be delicious, but it didn’t seem capable of appeasing the attitude of Ai’s parents.

“B-but... at this point, studying at a stranger’s house is really unordinary... it’s to be expected why you may be opposed to it.”

“No. This doesn’t matter to us.”

What!? Doesn’t matter!?

“In our world—whether it’s managing an inn or being a chef, it is to be expected for people to stay elsewhere for their vocational training. I heard the world of shogi is the same.”

“This, erm... yeah, erm... I see...”

I gave a vague response.

In the world of shogi, disciples living together with their masters are a rare breed. Of those players under forty, I suppose only anedeshi and I had the same experience. However, it seemed Master Kiyotaki did convince them through this

method.

“In any profession, there is a need for people to leave home to hone their craft. In this sense, we really do not know how to express our gratefulness to you for being willing to groom our daughter, Kuzuryuu-sensei.”

“Huh.”

“But this might not be best choosing for our daughter—”

“Simply put, we are wondering if the profession of a ‘female pro’ will really bring about happiness for our daughter.”

Before the father could finish, the mother rattled on,

“As parents, we have investigated this... the status of female pros is very unstable. Many of them either go on hiatus, or retire early, no? What do you think of this Kuzuryuu-sensei?”

“Well...”

I pondered for a little bit, and then nodded,

“The future for female pros really isn’t bright.”

“Master!?”

Ai, who finally finished her butter rice, looked surprised as she grabbed at my sleeve, but I gave a reassuring nod, and said, “Compared to male pros, there are far few female pros, and the fee for every match is lower. The appearance fee they get for other jobs is less than men, and it’s a fact that they’re more economically constrained. However...”

I continued,

“Given the ability of your daughter, I suppose I don’t have to worry about this.”

“Why?”

“She has outstanding talent.”

I said with much confidence, sounding more amped up as I explained,

“If she continues to grow, it’s only a matter of time until she wins a title on

the female circuit. She's energetic and lively, so I believe there will be many wanting to have her for lessons or being an assistant to shogi programmes, so she should be a lot more financially stable than the other female pros."

"..."

"It's true that using one's own hobbies as work is tough in some sense."

I said as I recalled those days before Ai came here—the time when I nearly got crushed because of all the consecutive defeats. It's painful to be denied on what we like.

"But that's more fun than being unable to do what we like, so I think..."

Not everybody can be shogi players.

There's an overwhelming majority who gave up on their dreams; I feel those that have the talent to achieve their dreams but are unable to grasp their chances are committing a much bigger sin.

"I see..."

Ai's mother smiled.

"Pardon my question, but Kuzuryuu-sensei, have you ever groomed a disciple?"

"Well... your daughter is my first..."

"Then, if I may ask, how do you determine that Ai has talent? How do you determine that she's able to be groomed into a title winner?"

"..."

"You do seem very confident, but you have interfered in a child's life without a clear basis. Do you think this is correct?"

Upon hearing the mother treat me like a kid, the father next to her immediately reproached, "Hey! That's being rude to sensei!"

"Please keep quiet, you."

"Yes."

Father!? Aren't you giving up way too quickly here!?

Ai approached my ear, and explained,

“...Papa was married into the family. He can't lift his head up to mama.”

“...I guessed so.”

Seemed that I couldn't rely on the father...

“I have to ask you again, Kuzuryuu-sensei. Are you able to assure that you will be able to groom our daughter into a title holder?”

“Th-this is—”

“Of course!!”

Answering this wasn't me, but Ai, and she clenched her spoon, trying her best to convince her parents.

“Master taught me well! He's always kind to me, sometimes very intense, but in terms of technique or strength, he's always better... we kept on going until morning for our first time too!”

““ ... ””

“Sh-she's talking about shogi, you know!? I was just teaching!!”

Ai's parents, and even the shop owner of Twelve were giving me suspicious looks. Why?

“...Anyway...”

Ai's mother coughed, trying to overcome the awkwardness that was a family watching a comedy and coming across a bed scene.

“I am going to bring my daughter back. Is this okay?”

“Don't wanna!”

Before I could argue, Ai ducked under the table, and grabbed the table leg, intending to resist until the very end. In shogi terms, it's a bear in the hole, sturdy defence, that.

“I don't want to go back! Daratsu!!”

“You dare call your parents that!!”

Mother and daughter argued across the table. This situation's...

I asked the father,

“Erm, just to ask. What does ‘dara’ mean in this case?”

“Idiot or bastard, about that meaning.”

Oh...^[98]

So, in other words, Ai had been scolding anedeshi that while giving an angelic smile. If this is made known, someone’s definitely going to get murdered by anedeshi, and that someone’s me!

I’ve got to keep this a secret... but if anedeshi searches it up on the internet, it’s all over. So my cause of death is the internets. Internet’s really the enemy to humanity, but I can’t help but wonder, is it really an illness?^[99]

Having made up my mind, I tried to coax the mother.

“It’s true that my guidance alone might not be enough. However, there are establishments in the shogi world that specialize in grooming female pros, and she’ll be completely educated there.”

“is that so?”

“It’s called a ‘Research Group’, and any females who train there and reach a certain level will become female pros. In other words, the Kansai Association shall give its all to help your daughter reach that level.”

“...”

“We have registered her for an Entrance Test. It’s not too late to wait for the result, yes? It just so happens to be tomorrow.”

“If sensei says so...”

The father asked timidly, and the tense atmosphere eased up a little. Like a hermit crab, Ai poked half her face from beneath the floor. How cute.

“What is it called again... a Research Group? How are the tests held?”

“They will face pro players or those aiming to be pros, and be given handicaps... anyway, it’s to have them give handicaps, and play three rounds. Depending on the performance, it’ll be determined if she passes.”

“Understood.”

The mother nodded,

“So if Ai wins all her matches, I will allow her to join the Research Group.”

““A-all!?””

Ai and I echoed in unison, and the father stood up to protest.

“This request is too—”

“Please remain quiet, you.”

“Yes.”

And the father sat down.

“If my daughter is as talented as what you are saying, she should have no problems passing with flying colors, no?”

“Erm... it’s not that kind of test. There’s no real need to beat the examiners. Even if she does lose all three matches, if she does well, it’s considered a pass, so—”

“I do not care about that.”

The mother sharply cut off my words, and I could only remain quiet.

“Whether the opponents cannot win, if she can’t win with handicaps, this shows that she only has that much talent, right? A shogi player should be able to figure out how much talent he has; if she really does have talent, three straight wins shouldn’t be too difficult, am I right?”

This is too much to ask for...

There’s often such a misconception by outsiders, but in the world of shogi, even with a vast difference in ability, there’s no guarantee for a player to win all the matches.

There’s a saying that even if it’s twice or thrice, and that there’s a vast difference in ability between two players, there’s a chance that the weaker player can win one out of three times.

Ai has outstanding talent, but even after the opponent gives up a few pieces, there’s no guarantee that she could win three straight matches against vastly experienced opponents, especially when she only played for less than half a

year.

While I intended to explain this—

“I won’t lose!”

Ai snuck out from under the table, and accepted her mother’s challenge, showing as much stubbornness as the latter. She grabbed my tongue, and spoke in dialect.

“I’ve been studying a lot with Master for long! No way will I lose here!!”

“Then win.”

The mother arrogantly said to the daughter,

“If you’re able to win all your matches, I’ll let you continue your training. If you lose just one, you need to give up on shogi and return home. Understood?”

The Last Night

“...Alright, this will be all for practice.”

I told my disciple, who's in pajamas, and intended to pack up the pieces. At this moment, Ai, seated before the shogi board, kept clinging onto me.

“Master! Just one more match—”

“No.”

“But...”

“You need sufficient rest before an important match. This is an important tournament skill for a pro player.”

I pat Ai's head to calm her down.

“The time allocated to you for tomorrow is 35 minutes, and once that expires, it's 1 minute per move. You'll play three matches, and you have the pressure to win all your matches. Your stamina will be really drained.”

“...Yes.”

“Don't worry. Just go with your usual ability, and you'll definitely win easily.”

Ai had been playing shogi since morning, and after bidding farewell to her parents, was practicing her openings, and after a shower, she played a few rounds against me with me giving a handicap.

At this point, Ai could beat me with a two-piece handicap. I believe that even with the Research Group members as opponent, she'll be able to win all three matches without any handicap.

What left me uneasy was...that Ai's not used to pressure.

She had no experience in a tournament, and the only match she had something on the line was the one when she wanted to be my disciple.

So, the most terrifying thing was that she would be crushed by the pressure.

The only way to overcome this is to accumulate experience. If there's a magic pill that could eliminate all the pressure, I would have had her eat it...

"...Master."

"Hm?"

I thought she was asleep, but she hugged the pillow, and covered half her face as she looked over at me.

She was blushing, fidgeting around.

Blushing, fidgeting around... ahh.

"You need the toilet before you sleep?"

"That's not it!"

Ai's face was flushed red like an explosion. "Fuu... uuu..." she was fidgeting more than before, and then, she yelled as she hugged the pillow firmly, her mind made up.

"E-erm... Master, can I have something to feel you by?"

"..."

...Sure feels... erm, like an elementary school kid,

"Li-like a handkerchief you use, or a pen...anything! I want it... as a talisman for a match..."

"Uh... huh, a talisman."

Yes yes, huh, so that's how it is.

Of course I knew what this meant, you know?

"...Right, I'll prepare something for you."

"Th-thank you, Master!"

"Okay, now go to sleep."

"Yes! Good night, Master!"

She put her hands on the tatamis, bowed politely, put on her kitty pajamas, turned around, and teetered back to the bedroom.

Thud. The door was closed.

“Hm... I’ll give that here.”

From the wall cupboard, I took out my calligraphy tools and a white fan.

Three times I experienced writing on a fan, when I obtained my fourth dan, when I challenged for the title of the Dragon King, and when I won the title. ‘Fresh’, ‘life’, ‘Amberjack’. Sure seemed like some advertisement for a fish shop.

I intended to write another word.

I didn’t have a magic pill.

But to convey through word what was most important, the necessary feeling she needed to have no matter the match, I earnestly wrote down—

“Courage”.

The next morning, I was woken up, as my disciple discovered the fan signed by her master placed by her bedside, “Nya—!!” and called out like a cat.

Research Group Test

“Please, come this way.”

I met Ai’s parents at the entrance of the Association, and led them to the arena, where the Research Group Test was being held.

I had been calling it a Test all this while, but a Research Group Test Day didn’t really exist.

A Test’s only held as a normal activity, called a ‘regular meeting’. If the performance is good enough for people to think ‘she has potential!’, then she will be allowed to join.

“No need to be so nervous. Just play as normal.”

Keika, ranked C2 in the Research Group, gently said to Ai to get her to calm down and relax.

Ai was nervously kneeling in a corner of the room, firmly holding the fan I placed by her beside.

There were 39 men and women affiliated to the Kansai Research Group, almost of them in elementary and middle school.

Amongst them, 9 were aiming to be female pros, and they’re all older.

Keika, at 25 years old, is the oldest of the lot. The average age of the others is about high school level, and for elementary school, only Mio, Ayano who came by just a while back, and Ai.

“Good morning, everyone.”

The manager of the Research Group, 7th Dan Yoshitsune Kuruno greeted everyone, and started taking names.

Once he was done, he took a large board called the ‘large plate’ (which has the pattern of a shogi board, and shogi pieces with magnets stuck onto them) to hold a simple strategy seminar, and then briefly touched on the mindset of a

Research Group member.

On this day, he said this,

“What have you worked hard as to become stronger?”

Kuruno-sensei said as he looked around at everyone in the room, asking with a gentle voice.

“Played some actual matches!”, “solved a lot of tsumeshogi!” the elementary school kids answered.

“Hm, there are many ways, like playing matches against others, solving tsumeshogis, but the most important thing of all is to ‘accumulate experience’.”

He raised an example,

“For example, those that cannot sit properly for too long will try for just one match today, endure until midway through the second match next time around, and then two matches after that... by accumulating experience, you will find yourself better than before. This is what it means to be working hard.”

Sensei said, and the few elementary school kids started sitting in a seiza. Such innocence from them is really cute.^[100]

“Today a newcomer shall take the Entrance Test. To all parties involved, I hope you will show something different from the Research Group and a typical dojo, and all the hard work you have put in till this point.”

Ai’s body froze the moment she was mentioned. With a wry smile, Keika patted her back.

“Now then, let us announce the opponent for the first one.”

Once the matchups and formats were announced, the members immediately sat before the shogi boards that were laid out in the room, and put on the pieces. Every person present wanted to play as soon as possible, and I, affected by such an atmosphere, was itching on my hands.

The manager then said to Ai, who was left behind.

“Hinatsuru, your dojo is the 3rd rank, right?”

“Y-yes!”

“Then, how about playing an even match against Sadatou?”

The first opponent’s Ai’s friend in the Research Group, Ayano Sadatou.

The latter had just joined the Research Group, and remained stuck at F1 rank. From her performances at the JS Research Group held at my house, she seemed decent.

An even match, and the tile toss showed that Ai would start later.

“Please start.”

““Please take care of me!””

The manager announced the start of the match, and the members bowed to each other, before everyone present started to play. All that could only be heard at the arena was the electronic sounds of the chess clocks, and the sounds of the first moves being made.

“Hoo...”

Ai’s father let out a sigh, and her mother too widened her eyes.

The anxious atmosphere from before vanished, and the immaturity vanished from the children’s faces. To first-timers looking on, it might have been an intriguing scene. Present here were future killers aiming to assassinate the enemy’s king.

As for Ai’s match—

“Oh, chance.”

““What?””

I commented, and Ai’s parents looked over in unison.

“She’s overly wary of Ai’s attacks, so even though she moves first, she’s in a defensive position, and created an opening in the formation. It’s quite small, not big enough to break the entire formation...”

But that would be enough for Ai.

“...Un!!”

Ai attacked the opening with the Bishop, not wasting any time.

“Eh!?”

Ayano faltered when she suddenly saw this sudden attack by an important piece.

“I-it’s a waste not to take it.”

She took the Bishop without thinking, and then, it was a one-sided assault situation against her.

Ai had the advantage, and kept attacking, closing in on Ayano’s king.

The attacks came like rapids, surging forward at the little opening.

“I... I can’t handle this... I lost...”

Ayano couldn’t understand what happened, and dejectedly lowered her head, admitting defeat.

“Thank you for the match.”

Ai enthusiastically bowed at her opponent. Her mind was still going at full speed, and her speech was fast. She was so excited, her cheeks were red.

Upon hearing the match was over, the surrounding kids started chatting.

“Really? It’s over?”

“Little Dragon’s so strong...”

34 moves. A typical match had around 100 or so. It’s abnormally rare to have such a small move count.

Ai’s father too couldn’t help but exclaim,

“Sh-she won!? Ai won!?”

“This is a victory won by your daughter’s will. Before the opponent could get into the mood for battle, she attacked while the guard’s down.”

“Will?”

Her mother said with some spite,

“Isn’t shogi a table top game? I thought it has nothing to do with willpower.”

“Shogi is really a game.”

Twenty years ago—

There was a universal champion who continues to dominate the world of shogi till this day, and when he won an unprecedented 7 straight titles, a reporter asked him, “What do you think Shogi is?”. He answered, ^[101]

“Shogi—is just a game.”^[102]

“But since the players are human, there are definitely going to be psychological factors, like carelessness or fear.”

This match would be the best example. If Ayano did not get rattled because of Ai’s attacks, and tried to fight back calmly, it wouldn’t be hard for her to reverse the situation.

However, she was affected by how quickly Ai discarded an important piece, played a bad move without thinking too much, and ended up losing in so few moves.

No handicaps, and Ayano got to start first, so it would have been advantageous for her to attack first. The moment she chose not to do so, her will lost to Ai’s.

“Ai’s too strong... too strong...”

“Bu-but, I was in danger here... I nearly self-destructed here...”

While Ayano and Ai were having their post mortem, “Oh...” the people watching from the exclaimed.

Ai’s attacks were really exciting, and from how she played, people could see her talent.

Such talent could attract other talents.

Pro

“Hm. I shall be your opponent then.”

Upon seeing that person volunteer, I couldn't help but widen my eyes.

“Kuruno-sensei, you...?”

It's the manager of the Research Group, 7th Dan Yoshitsune Kuruno.

Ai's father whispered to me,

“That's...?”

“Manager of the Research Group... if your daughter manages to enter, he'll be the one in charge. He's ranked in class B1, a really strong pro player...”^[103]

Just to note, I'm in C2, three ranks lower than him.^[104]

Unlike this Scum Dragon King who accidentally won the title, Kuruno-sensei's ability is the real deal. That 'Kuruno's World' flair of his is infamous enough to be feared by many shogi players.

“She'll really be playing against a pro...”

“Yeah. Of course, there'll be handicaps.”

2 pieces handicap. Kuruno-sensei played while giving up the Rook and Bishop.

Typically, an ideal matchup would be to give up both Lances on the side. It seemed he was really intending to test Ai's ability.

Ai's parents seemed unable to hide their shock once they saw their daughter facing a pro across the table.

With them watching on, Ai firmly held the fan on her knees, and raised her voice as she thanked her opponent.

“P-please take care of me!”

“Yes, please take care of me too.”

After the greetings, Kuruno-sensei took off his suit, revealing a short-sleeved shirt beneath.

Kuruno-sensei's habit is to remove his suit before playing, and so is wearing a short-sleeved shirt. This also showed that he's getting serious.

There's a little commotion at the door.

"Which one, which one? Which one's the Ryuuou's disciple?"

"Oh, Kuruno-sensei's playing!"

"This is going to be fun!"

The Kansai Shogi Association isn't big, and rumors of 'an amazing kid' quickly spread. The staff members, honorary members onlooking reporters, and even female pros and pro players gathered to see Ai's abilities.

This strange atmosphere left Ai's father hoarse,

"Ca-can she win...?"

"Normally, it's very difficult...but Ai has a great chance!"

As long as she played the opening right, maintained her advantage, and kept on attacking, she would have a chance...but— "Hm... I see. How hardworking you are. Then—"

After several moves, 7th Dan Kuruno played a deviation not seen in the openings.

"...Ugh?"

Ai saw this strange, sacrificial move, and couldn't help but stop.

Gugugu. She leaned forward, twisting her fingers on her knees. Ever since the start, she had been reading cautiously. No matter the moves, she was just trying her best to read the intent behind every move, and showed her talent,

"...Like this, like this, like this like this like this like this like this like this like this... right!"

Ai let out a rhythmic mutter, and shoved the piece up. One strong move!

"Ohh, she's going for it!"

“That’s amazing!”

The onlookers exclaimed. Such a reaction left Ai’s father panicking.

“Wh-what now?”

“Ai chose to completely ignore the opponent’s move and tackle head on. She’s not scared of a pro’s challenge. She’s strong-willed.”

“That girl has such a side to her...”

Kuruno-sensei stared at the board intently, opening his mouth that had been closed all this while.

“Hmm... Ryuuou.”

“Yes?”

“I have three bags there. Please bring me the middle one.”

“O-okay!”

I took the large sports bag placed in the middle of the room. Woah!? This bag’s heavy!!?

“S-sensei...! I got the bag...!”

“Hm, thanks.”

Kuruno-sensei took the bag from my hands, and then pulled out a large round machine from inside.

He placed it behind himself, and switched it on.

Bzzzzzzt... a deep buzzing echoed, and everyone present was left gobsmacked.

“Kuruno-sensei got the air purifier out...!”

“He’s for real! This isn’t a guidance match now...the pro’s going all out now!”

Th-that’s one of Kuruno-sensei’s ‘7 Tools for a Match’, the anion generator!

“...Is that thing even effective?”

Ai’s mother frowned. Well, it’s a valid question.

“Well, the most important objective... is probably to relax. It’s important to

relax though.”

“What do you mean?”

“The human brain needs to filter out all uneasiness and noise so as to focus the concentration to the maximum. If there’s external interference, humans won’t be able to concentrate fully.”

Thus, players would try not to plan for other events before a match, or use earbuds during a match, or other methods to gather their concentration.

For Kuruno-sensei, ‘anions can purify the air♪’ and in that situation, he’ll be able to eliminate the uneasiness—so I thought.

“He’s trying to eliminate all the noise and create a situation where he can concentrate fully. That’s a device needed for such a ritual.”

“But it’s just shogi. Is there really a need for this?”

“Everyone here bet their lives on this little shogi board. No matter what it is, anyone will try anything that’ll help them.”

I got increasingly used to the cold words of Ai’s mother.

According to what Ai told me the previous day, the lady boss always hated shogi, and it was only because of the local onsen association’s request that they welcomed the Dragon King match. The reason for that was that her father (Ai’s maternal grandfather) was obsessed with shogi all day long, even abandoning his family business.

Over here, in our hearts, shogi’s the only thing to live for. We might not be able to live without shogi. That’s what we believe in as we continue to battle.

“I heard that in the world of GO, a pro player in China played while inserting pins into his head.”

“Pi-pins into the head? He had pins in the head during the match?”

“Shows that he really wants to win. Winning matches is the most important thing after all.”

The match quickly developed into the mid game, and then into endgame that’s hard to break down.

Even a pro player couldn't break out pieces from out of nowhere like magic. To win over the enemy pieces, there's a need to rattle the opponent, and rob the enemy's pieces to increase the fighting strength.

That's why pro players will set several traps on the board, and create a minefield, blowing up any opponent who accidentally entered their territory, and gradually wear down the enemy's fighting strength.

However, Ai brought her face to the board, shaking as she read the situation. She then boldly moved the piece into the minefield.

"Hm!?"

She charged right at the starter's king with ferocity, and that attack left 7th Dan Kuruno with his eyes widened.

The Silver General jumped into the enemy's territory like a dance, and skilfully avoided the trap laid out, rattling Kuruno-sensei's formation. She then attacked with both the Rook and Bishop, creating an opening. It's intense. The onlookers were thoroughly excited, the atmosphere in the room heating up, and the competitors' bloods were heating up, boiling.

"Nn..."

Kuruno-sensei folded his arms and groaned. He definitely never expected Ai to actually avoid all the traps he set up. Ai's talent really was hard to grasp.

The little traps he set up did not work. Seated before him was a budding talent about to reveal itself.

"Hmm!!"

After a long thought into this, sensei made a decisive move, deciding not to protect his King, but to attack Ai's king.

Seeing this, I whispered in a voice too soft for the players to hear,

"It's over."

"Huh?"

Ai's father looked over at me in shock.

"The-the winner's already decided?"

“Yeah. There’s a lot of moves, but Kuruno-sensei’s king is going to be checkmated. All that’s left is to see if Ai manages to see it...”

If Ai turned defence to attack, the situation would be reversed. It’s a trap, one of the many ways to move.

There’s an element of ‘trust’ that comes to pros.

‘A pro should be stronger than me.’

‘A pro should be able to read all the moves’.

People could ‘trust’ pros this easily, and pros would use this trust to attack the weakness in the opponent’s heart.

‘If a pro just attacks without defending, it means that there’s no danger to the king...I got to protect it!’

The moment Ai believed that a pro’s reputation surpassed her judgement, it would be the moment she lost. For players who couldn’t believe in themselves, there’s no victory to talk of.

So, what would Ai do? So I worried—but it was for nothing.”

“...Un!”

Ai attacked without hesitation, and checkmated the opponent. She read that the enemy’s king had no room to retreat, and only trusted her judgement.

Once this move was made, 7th Dan Kuruno put his hand on the table.

“Yes, I lost.”

“T-thank you very much!”

Ai panicked, and lowered her head.

Though it was a handicap, it seemed she couldn’t hide her joy after beating a pro. Her face’s all red, her moist eyes showing the determination she had as she read every move, the left hand holding the fan still shaking.

After a little post mortem, Kuruno-sensei came to my side, and whispered in a voice nobody else could hear, “This child’s strong. Her talent won’t be limited to just the Research Group level.”

“You think so too, Kuruno-sensei?”

“She beat me through talent alone.”

Kuruno-sensei grimaced, and scowled, nodding.

“This child definitely needs grooming. Nobody will object to counting this win as two wins when it’s a two-piece handicap against a pro.”

Ai could be considered to have passed the Research Group Test...

But he did not notice the conflicted look on my face, and smiled at the Hinatsuru couple standing by the side.

“Are you two Ai’s parents? Your daughter really has talent.”

“R-really?”

Ai’s father looked delighted. There’s no parent who wouldn’t be delighted by praise for their daughter.

“Yes. The accuracy as she reads the moves is really astounding. However, what’s most Impressive is her strong heart. It’s brilliant.”

“Heart...? Does this have anything to do with talent in shogi?”

““Of course.””

Kuruno-sensei and I said in unison.

“Almost all shogi matches end with ‘surrender’, which means admitting that they lost. She kept on fighting even when faced with tough odds. Without a strong heart, she won’t be able to do this.”

“I see...”

“However, what’s most important is the determination to stand up again after losing.”

“After losing?”

Once you lose, isn’t it over? So the mother gave such a quizzical look, and sensei continued to explain, “There are often losses when playing shogi, and surely, she’ll lose when faced with people stronger than her. However, without playing the strong, she’ll never dream of the thought to be stronger.”

Once she entered the Research Group and aim to be a female pro, it would mean that she would lose thousands of times.

Once the pressure of losing crushed her, or if she gave up on becoming stronger, the path would never be open to her.

“The real defeat is inner trauma. As long as the heart isn’t hurt, it’s not considered a defeat. So, what’s really needed isn’t a strong shogi ability, but a strong heart. This is the rarest talent of them all.”

Kuruno-sensei did his best to explain, and gave me a smile,

“Well, no wonder you had her as a disciple, Ryuuou.”

“No... hahaha.”

I tried to laugh it off. I couldn’t be saying that she was the one who barged into my house.

“Yaichi, with such talent, perhaps you should consider having her join the Honorary Group?”

“Honorary Group?”

The father asked.

“It’s an upper tier group of the Research Group, a gateway to being a pro player. There are few female players, but there’s been a rise in number.”

“Do female players have to join the Honorary Group?”

“No, those that join the Honorary Group can’t become female pros.”

“Okay, okay...”

I hurriedly tried to butt in.

“Let’s talk about that later... anyway, first to enter the Research Group—”

“No.”

Pikak! There was the sound of a shogi piece slammed.

The one opposing was the mother.

“The condition to have her continue playing is three straight wins. Please start the third match.”

“...Yes, understood. Let’s continue with the Test then.”

Kuruno-sensei looked surprised, but he immediately realized the reason behind all this.

Shogi does not bring any benefit to life in any way.

So many people thought, and in most situations, it really was the case.

Thus, parents, especially those that really put utmost attention on their children, would normally hope for their children to give up on shogi as soon as possible. They hoped their children would take the one path to the top, and get rid of shogi from their lives. There are children who had talent, but had to give up on shogi, and all that was due to their parents’ love.

Kuruno-sensei had seen many instances of this, as he had been enthusiastically promoting shogi. Thus, he quickly understood what was going on.

“If she can beat the next opponent, your daughter will definitely become a female pro.”

“Is that person strong?”

“Very—no doubt that she’s the strongest **female** in the 1,400 years of shogi history.”

Kuruno-sensei introduced, and a pretty girl appeared before the shogi board, like a white angel descending from the skies.

““Ahh—””

Ai widened her eyes.

And I, thoroughly shocked, let out a stiff, raspy voice.



“Ane... deshi...?”

Double title holder Ginko Sora slowly sat.

Honorary Member

“...The... ‘Snow White of Naniwa’...!?”

Ai’s parents voiced out once they saw anedeshi seated.

“Both of you know her too...?”

“We knew of such a person when researching through famous female pros, but why is a female pro... a title holder at a Research Group Test?”

I hesitated over how to explain this, trying to answer the question from the father.

“Anedeshi... Ginko Sora isn’t a **female pro.**”

“Eh? B-but—”

“Yes, she has titles in the female tourney, but she’s actually **an Honorary member.** Because of this, **she can’t become a female pro.**”

“Honorary... so what the Manager just mentioned?”

“It’s an organization set up for those aiming to become pros. Over there, she’s 2nd Dan.”

Honorary members who aren’t at least 3rd Dan will carry out Guidance Matches, and of course, their winning records will be reflected in the Research Group.

I completely forgot about this...

“Basically, a Research Group is a cram school for those aiming to enter an Honorary Group. Once the rank in the Research Group is A2, that person will be a 6th Kyu in the Honorary Group.”

“W-wait a minute! You need to be C1 in your Research Group to be a female pro, right? So that means—”

“Yep, **even those at 6th Kyu in the Honorary Group is stronger in ability**

compared to a female pro.”

People often misunderstood, but female pros and male pro players are completely different. ^[105]

As for where, the biggest difference would be ‘ability’.

There’s no female out there who could rise up to 4th Dan to become a pro player.

However—

“Sora’s the first female to enter an Honorary Group and be a Dan Holder. This is one of the reasons why Kuruno-sensei deemed her the ‘strongest female in history’.”

“But... why are honorary members allowed to hold female titles?”

“In the female tourneys, there are two that are open to public, not limited to female pros. Any female can participate.”

These are the ‘MyNavi Female Open’ and the ‘Female Ou Title Match’. ^[106]

As an Honorary Member, anedeshi was allowed to participate. She crushed all the strongest females, and obtained the two biggest titles of the female tournaments, ‘Queen’ and ‘Female Ou’.

Female Master: Rina Shakando. ^[107]

Female Throne Holder: Ika Sainokami ^[108].

Female Jade General: Ryou Tsukiyomizaka ^[109].

Sakura of the Mountain City: Machi Kugui ^[110].

And double title holder and Honorary Member Ginko Sora, who massacred the Queen and Female Ou.

Back then, anedeshi was only 11, a 6th grader in elementary school.

Ever since the first female pro match she had—she never lost to a female pro.

“47 matches, 47 wins, that’s her record against female pros. She never lost. The ‘white’ in the ‘Snow White of Naniwa’ doesn’t refer to her skin or hair.”

Like a white start with snow piled upon it.

The real reason people called her the Snow White was because of the spotless record of being undefeated.

“Sh-she’s going to play against my daughter...”

“Without any handicaps, there’s no doubt she’ll get slaughtered. It’s a handicap match though, so your daughter has a chance of winning!”

And right when I said so, anedeshi lined up all the pieces, and removed the Rook and a Lance, putting them in the pieces box.

A Rook-Lance handicap, or what they call the ‘Ichohan’^[111]

When ranked Honorary member gives such a handicap, it means the opponent’s ability is around C to D class.

Ai managed to beat a pro player with a two-piece handicap, so her ability should be at least D. I couldn’t say that she had no chances of winning.

But on the other hand, if she couldn’t beat anedeshi in such a setup, she wouldn’t be able to become a title holder even if she became a female pro.

Because if she wants to win the biggest title of the female tourney, she’ll have to beat this monster without any handicaps.

“...”

During the short moment before the match, anedeshi lowered her head slightly, closed her eyes, and motivated herself.

Any ordinary elementary school kid would have been intimidated just by this, and even start crying.

I wanted to cheer Ai on, but in this situation, talking with her would be no different from giving suggestions, and it would be a foul.

Ai had to face such a powerful pressure with her own strength—

“...I won’t lose... I won’t lose... no way...!”

Ai muttered, trying to cheer herself on. She opened the fan she held in her hands, and stared at the word on it.

“Because Master gave me ‘courage’...!”

“.....Tch.”

Anedeshi glared at me... so I felt. Also, did she just click her tongue?

“Please start.”

“Please take care of me.”

“P-please take—”

Tak!!

Before Ai could lift her head, anedeshi made the first move, exerting heaps of pressure on the opponent.

And this first move was one atypical of an opening.

At this point, Ai could not begin with a fixed opening... in a certain sense, this would be the best opportunity.

This ‘fixed opening’ would refer to the moves most beneficial to both sides.

In other words, by not following that fixed opening, it’s very likely that a disadvantageous situation would occur.

If Ai could find the correct move, it might be more beneficial for her to not play the usual moves.

“...Like this, like this, like this...”

Ai spent a lot of time in the opening trying to read the moves, probably because she understood this, or that she sensed that it was beneficial to her. She went all out right from the get-go.

“Like this, like this, like this, like this, like this, like this, like this like this like this like this like this like this like this like this...”

Once she read the moves to the very last moment... she made a move!

“Great!”

“This means that she has a great chance, right?”

One great move after another, and the room was buzzing.

It was an all-out fight that broke away from the norms, but Ai’s performance against anedeshi remained decent, sometimes even superior. Even the

Honorary members of the Genius Clubs are giving looks of praise. She's strong!

"She's... the real deal."

Kuruno-sensei let out a long sigh.

Ai kept attacking at anedeshi's moves, and increased her advantage. At first, it was an 80 to 20 difference, and then it was 99 to 1.

If it were a pro match, this would be enough difference to forfeit. But—

"..."

Anedeshi remained unmoved. That icy cold face was staring at the board.

The white skin before the match became a crimson red.

I saw anedeshi open her fan, fanning at her neck vigorously, and said,

"Anedeshi... Sora will heat up whenever she focuses her thoughts."

"How's that possible? Are you saying it's Wisdom fever?"^[112]

Ai's mother pretentiously shook her head.

"It means 'a baby easily catching a fever while developing', right?"

"It doesn't seem to be medically possible, but she's definitely heating up."

And once anedeshi gets serious, her eyes will change colors.

The usual grey eyes would become a pale blue similar to a winter sky. I played against anedeshi more than any others, and understood that when she gets serious, anedeshi's basically a different person.

And the color of the eyes at this point—was an icy blue.

"...Now the show's getting started."

The Honorary members watching by the sidelines muttered as they discussed.

"There are two end games for the Honorary Group"

As the words implied, it meant that Honorary members who sensed that the situation had turned disadvantageous against them would change their style of play to force a second end game.

Pro players would wish to have a 'perfect match record', to not struggle till

death. It is an art for a pro player to understand that all is lost, and that they would offer their heads to end the match.

However, Honorary members are different.

In an Honorary Group, winning is the only answer. There's no room for any ambiguous term like 'beauty'. One can become a pro by reaching 4th Dan, and for this objective, there's a need to crush everyone else. It's the entrusted mission of an Honorary member to send the buddies they studied with for more than ten years into chaos.

An Honorary member who loses has no value.

“...”

Tak! Anedeshi folded the fan, and made the next move with a loud click.

“The Bishop's moving back!”

“She's intending to fight until the very end...?”

She forced the one important piece she had, the Bishop back into her camp, beginning a thorough defensive match.

Anedeshi was like a disadvantaged beast crouching down, storing enough energy, and preparing for the last hit. She kept harassing, waiting for the chance to counterattack.

“...Ku!!”

And on the other hand, Ai understood that she had the advantage, and was more cautious in every move she made, making sure she did not lose this disadvantage. She suddenly stopped her hand.

It was as though she was in the middle of a Marathon, right at the end, and worried about the footsteps behind her.

If she looked behind just a bit, the difference might have shortened, and she would let the opponent catch up.

The end game of a shogi match is a tug of war against such fear.

At this moment, an electronic sound rang, trying to rattle Ai further.

“Eh!? Ti-time's...!?”

Ai looked at the chess clock in shock. She used up her allotted time. Time limit of a move a minute.

She used up too much time during the opening. As the match dragged on too long, Ai got attacked by anedeshi **in another manner**— *“Time attack”*

Ai had an exceptional, otherworldly ability to read, but without time, how much she could read would also be limited. Ai could not read deeply into the moves, and her attacks were lacking in strength, ending up with her pieces being taken.

Anedeshi moved without hesitation, using the pieces she took to strength her defences.

“...!”

Ai, who had been attacking the entire time, stopped doing so.

Again and again she continued to attack, but she got further and further away from the opponent’s King, her pieces taken away one after another. She had no time to calm down and respond however, and she was really anxious.

And not only her breathing.

Anedeshi even got control on Ai’s breathing.

“Fuu... ehh! Uuu...!! Huu... huuu...!”

Ai grabbed her hair and tugged at her chest, groaning bitterly. Before anyone knew it, large amount of sweat appeared on her forehead, and her face was as white as paper.

Seeing their daughter suffer so much, Ai’s parents were stunned.

“A-Ai’s... suffering so much...”

“It’s just shogi. Why’s she in so much pain?”

“Hyperventilation.”

““Huh?””

Kuruno-sensei explained,

“It’s a similar symptom to excessive breathing. She’s breathing too fast, and

that caused her breaths to be frantic. There are symptoms like accelerated heartbeat, tightness of chest, or aching... of course, your daughter only has mild symptoms right now. However, what's terrifying is that 2nd Dan Sora might be starting this on purpose."

""For real?""

Well, yeah.

"2nd Dan Sora managed to time your daughter's breathing, and made a move while she exhales. Your daughter will then inhale due to how nervous she is, messing up her breathing rhythm. This is how she ends up hyperventilating."

In such a tense situation, when time is limited, even a pro would end up somewhat anxious when faced with such a move, and what was an advantageous position might end up insecure.

Shogi is an art created by humans in limited time.

There are other ways to obtain victory, not limited to just the truth on the board.

There's a situation that can't be seen from the records, a war that can't be reflected on a computer monitor; it existed between the players at the board.

Ai learned shogi through tsumeshogis and the internet, and was lacking in knowledge of such aspects.

AI was playing **shogi**.

And anedeshi's was playing **for the win**.

"...This is too harsh for a nine-year-old."

Even Kuruno-sensei, who gave a handicap, couldn't help but lament.

If I had to say so, this match was a showdown where an elementary school kid armed with a gun was facing an empty-handed killer. Even if the talents were similar, there was a vast difference in experience.

There were already more than 150 moves played, and the other matches were practically over.

Keika, Mio and Ayano were by the board, watching this intense match.

They had conflicted looks on their faces.

Of course, they're supporting Ai... but at the same time, they're jealous of her dazzling talents. It's to be expected that anyone living in the world of competitions would have such feelings.

"Haaa... haaa..... kuuu!!"

Ai was wincing painfully, and made a move while left with little time, but she played the wrong move, and made a mistake. Anedeshi calmly attacked, resetting the match from a near surrender to the starting point of the match. Despite this, Ai still had a massive advantage.

The most important thing when making mistakes is to 'forget the previous mistakes'.

Or else—

"...Ah!"

Once she made this move, Ai exclaimed softly.

It was an obvious mistake.

That move before was a risky move, but this one was really a bad move. The difference between them was instantly gobbled up.

"Wh-what happened!?"

"Multiple mistakes."

With the father panicking as he watched his daughter in much pain, I could only inform him of this cruel truth.

"It's common in baseball too, right? If someone is to pitch in bad condition, the mistakes will keep piling up... shogi's the same. Once she starts to worry about her mistakes, she'll make one after another."

The mistakes kept on coming, and the situation quickly became advantageous to anedeshi.

But anedeshi didn't turn defense into attack.

"...! Argh...!!"

Ai's anxiety was clear for all to see.

She was mentally driven to the ledge, and used her important pieces to approach the enemy's base boldly.

But this move—

“...A useless attack.”

Keika lamented, and I bit my lips.

The worst move.^[113]

Anedeshi had been waiting for a long time...the moment Ai's body and mind couldn't stand the pressure.

“...”

This time, anedeshi used a lot of time on this move.

She used the waiting time not just to seize the opportunity to read the board.

But also to let Ai understand that it was a bad move.

“Ah!.... Ahhh, ah... ahhhhh...!”

Ai cupped her head, having realized her mistake, and groaned in agony.

At this point, the outcome was clear.

Anedeshi overcame the handicap, and built up what could be said to be a winning scenario.

But like anedeshi's situation from before, Ai could continue harassing in such a situation. It's not considered a loss as long as she hasn't been mentally defeated.

And that's why anedeshi was preparing to crush Ai mentally.

“Woah! She's planning to eat all the pieces...”

“How cruel...”

Eat all the pieces—all of the opponent's pieces. Faced with anedeshi's onslaught, the Honorary members gave disapproving scowls.

Of course, anedeshi isn't the type of person to ease up when faced with

overwhelming criticism.

At this stage, anedeshi had no intention of ending the match, and eliminated all of Ai's attacking pieces or the wandering pieces.

She didn't give her opponent a chance to surrender, and stomped hard on the fingers that were barely grabbing the ledge. Upon seeing this, Kuruno-sensei murmured,

"So, the 'one move to lose friends'."

"She doesn't have any to begin with."

I retorted. Anedeshi had few friends. One could say that she didn't have any.

Such a scenario showed anedeshi's determination.

The world of shogi's very small; those that knew of each other through shogi would one day meet in the battlefield.

But if both sides are on very good terms, it'll be very easy to go easy in a match, and even in a match when the livelihoods are on the line, it's hard to go all out.

Anedeshi tried not to interact with others so much, so that she wouldn't have such an excuse.

She didn't need friends, or a lover.

The only thing she needed was shogi, an enemy.

In the future, once she leaves the Honorary group and become a pro, she'll probably keep her distance from Master and me.

Ginko Sora's such a player, and that's why I respect her.

But at this point, only at this point—

"...I hate you, anedeshi."

Every trick in and out of the book anedeshi was playing, the basics of these skills, are all honed through match training against me.

Ten years ago, anedeshi and I knew each other, and ever since, we started playing shogi. No, I should say we knew of each other through shogi. The only

thing relating us was shogi. Such a bond got stronger through more matches, sturdy.

As to the number of matches—it's about 50 thousand or so.

Just as how kids would try all kinds of pro wrestling techniques on each other, anedeshi and I tried out all kinds of formations and tactics, a whole lot of tactics outside the book that are edging the limits or outright fouls. We did anything to win. To be honest, when she entered the Honorary Group, I felt the place was too gentle.

At this point, the one torturing Ai was the other me.

Once this fact was shown before me, my heart was ripped apart.

“If I...”

If I had been harsher with her.

If I could have taught her more.

If I could have played a few more matches against her.

She might be able to beat anedeshi, and wouldn't have to suffer...

And while this regret was about to overwhelm me—that that moment.

There was a change at the board.

“A-Ai's playing style... is like Sora-sensei...”

“Sh-she caught up! The difference between them has shrank!!”

Ayano and Mio held their breaths, as though they're witnessing something amazing.

Anedeshi's attacks were somehow blunted.

The situation changed, and Ai, who lost the advantage, ended up not thinking much, just focusing on making the best move, and thus getting back the ability to read moves.

She then put her remaining forces around her King, creating a formation to fight until the very end.

This move was exactly the same as anedeshi's.

Ai started harassing this ranked opponent of an Honorary Group member, so as to start a 3rd end game.

“Hm!? She’s able to improve in such a situation...!”

Ai’s unpredictability left Kuruno-sensei somewhat impressed.

Her talent was—an unyielding heart.

“...Not yet... not yet...!”

She kept fighting on, and I could see a large tear in her right eye that dripped onto the board.

Seeing that, I regretted my prior regret.

Ai, who could read moves better than anyone else, understood very well that no matter how she struggled, she had no chance of fighting back.

She knew that there was no hope to salvage anything, yet this petite disciple continued on playing, never giving up on victory.

If this disciple hasn’t given up...how could I, as her master, not trust in her?

Like the match against Ayumu, Ai firmly believed that I would win, and I too believe in her, trusting that she’ll be able to reverse the match at the very end. If she continued on, anedeshi might play a fatal mistake.

Ai’s heart had yet to falter.

She did her best to motivate her plummeting heart, this unavoidable hopelessness of a match, and chose to fight on until the very end—her heart has not given up!

“...Come on! Come on...!”

Before I knew it, Ai’s father was murmuring this.

Her mother remained silent and stoic looking, but she was clenching her fists, veins popping from the back of her white hands.

Ai’s heart had yet to give up.

The adamant heart motivated the feelings of the onlookers surrounding them. Everyone paying attention to this board game was affected. It’s heating

up!!

—However, the match.

Anedeshi did not allow a reversal in situation through her moves, and the match gradually eased towards the end game. Finally, she checked Ai's King.

“...Not yet!”

Ai dropped a pawn from her pieces stand, fighting back hard on the board. ^[114]

And anedeshi proceeded to check from another angle.

“Not yet!”

Another drop. Ai dropped the remaining pieces she had, preventing the opponent's checks, putting her last hope in her King, letting it charge into anedeshi's camp.

Could it work!? Could she get away!?

Both sides were down to one minute time limit each, and a breath-taking battle was going on.

And then, when anedeshi checked for the seventh time.

“...I—”

Ai reached her hand for the pieces box—

She had no pawn left.

—Checkmate.

“...I.....”

The hand reaching for the stand clenched up, and she did her best to hold in her trembling voice.

“.....I... lost.....”

With all of her remaining strength, Ai forfeited.

End Game

“Anedeshi! Why were you so cruel—”

After the match.

Ai bit her lips, trying not to let out her sobbing as she lowered her head. Anedeshi did not intend to hold a Post Mortem as she left, and at that moment, I grabbed her shoulder.

I was shocked.

She was trembling.

“...I couldn’t force my way through.”

“Eh?”

“...I wanted to end this match quickly, but...”

There was some heat lingering after the match. She was shivering, muttering in a voice only I could hear.

Anedeshi—was terrified of how sharp Ai was.

Till the very end, she was terrified at the prospect of the situation being reversed if both sides were to clash. Thus, even though there was a chance to check midway through the match, she chose not to move, instead choosing to eliminate Ai from afar.

It wasn’t that she didn’t attack.

But that she couldn’t.

Ginko Sora, the undefeated Snow White whom they called the strongest in history, was actually terrified of a 9-year-old elementary school girl who only started playing shogi three months ago.

She, who wanted to traumatize her opponent, ended up traumatized...

“...Next time, I’m going to finish her off as fast as possible.”

She seemed to mutter to herself, and waved my hand off as she stormed out of the arena.

Next time.

That implied that anedeshi recognized Ai's talent.

Next time would imply that the next they meet up again—in other words, she determined that Ai has the talent to challenge for the strongest in the women's circuit, and in a roundabout manner, accepting that I would be Ai's master.

But, this 'next time' was—

“...It looks like it's decided.”

Ai's mother stated calmly, in a matter of fact.

“...!”

Ai's back shivered.

Like the patterns of the Gardenia flowers engraved at the legs of the board, a shogi player can't be looking for excuses. Coming up with excuses is something more deplorable than defeat itself.^[115]

Thus, Ai did not say anything. She knew that once she started to find excuses, she would have no right to continue.

This little girl remained silent before the shogi board, holding in her tears and words. Again, I sized her up.

This girl saved me.

She got me to return to the shogi board, while I was unable to play my own style.

She revitalized my heart that was nearly subject to setback.

The Honorary members, Research Group members, players, female pros, Association Staff, families in the Research Group—everyone passionate about shogi would have been motivated, wanting to get down to sitting at the shogi board and playing shogi. That was the hot-blooded match I saw on this day.

So—I had to repay her.”

“Ai.”

“...?”

Upon hearing my call, Ai looked over at me with teary eyes.

—You still want to continue playing shogi, right?

There was no need to speak, to voice out. I already knew the answer as I saw her little fingers still unwilling to let go of the piece.

“Ai, stand up and say goodbye to sensei. Thank him for the care he showed all this while—”

“Please wait.”

I stepped in. Ai’s mother seemed to have expected this to happen, her response dull.

“...Initially, the promise was that if she lost her match, my daughter will have to give up on shogi, no?”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“Then—”

“But that’s just **your own wishes**, right?”

“What...?”

“After seeing her match, I want to have your daughter as my disciple no matter what. So, this time, **it is my turn to scout.**”

Saying this, my knees landed on the floor.

My hands on the tatamis—

“I’ll bear responsibility, and groom your daughter into a female pro... someone capable of challenging for the title! So, please allow your daughter to continue playing shogi!”

Saying that, I lowered my forehead onto the tatamis.

I knelt down.

Even the stoic mother gasped upon seeing this, and Ai, completely stunned, loosened her hand, the piece in her hand let out a click as it landed on the floor.

“It’s true that I’m only 16, and I’ve only graduated from middle school. I’m a brat who don’t have any qualifications or social experience... but! I have the ability to be the best in shogi!”

Ryuuou? Of course he’s strong.

That’s the most prestigious title in the world of shogi, you know? That’s the strongest Dragon King who stands at the top of tens of millions of shogi players, in a tournament pro players, female pros, and amateurs can participate, after winning many consecutive victories like it’s some Martial Arts Tournament. ^[116]

In terms of shogi, my words are absolutely correct!

“I’ll continue to be stronger! I won’t just be stronger myself; I’ll definitely make sure every player around me gets stronger too!”

Maybe shogi is just a table top game.

But I don’t know anything else on this world that can make the heart throb.

Like the match played between Ai and anedeshi, that match that riveted the hearts of the viewers.

I made up my mind to play such shogi, and decided that I’ll definitely get stronger. Thus, again and again and again, I kept lowering my head.

“That’s how it is! Please let your daughter be my disciple! Please!”

There are kids who have talent, but are forbidden by their parents to continue playing,

On the other hand, there are also cases of pros who discovered talented kids and convinced the parents to take them in as disciples.

The senior players in had been considering the future of shogi, and felt that they had a mission to groom disciples for the shogi world even if they had to sacrifice themselves. That was what I thought.

But I was mistaken, it was a grave mistake.

They just wanted to groom disciples; they wanted to know what kind of shogi these kids will play.

—I want to link her up with shogi.

So I thought.

“I-I too!”

Ai, who had been silent as she listened in, knelt down on one knee as she approached me, her little hands on the tatamis. She raised her voice saying,

“I want to continue playing shogi! I want to be Master’s disciple! I want to be stronger! I don’t want to end everything just because I lost!”

She then lowered her head onto the tatamis, bowing to her parents.

“Papa! Mama! This is my one request in life! P-please let me continue to play shogi!”

“I’ll like to humbly request too!”

The Ryuuou and an elementary school kid knelt down, side by side—

“Master and disciple both kneeling...”

“A double kneel...”

There was an awkward atmosphere, along with such discussions.

But so what? Us Kansai players specialize in harassing. I’ll keep it up until they lose due to impatience, no matter how muddy and beaten up I am. I’m fine with kneeling many times!

““Please...!””

Ai and I lowered our heads, waiting for the mother to respond.

But, the one who finally spoke wasn’t the mother.

A Meijin in Life^[117]

“Don’t do this.”

“You...?”

Ignoring the mother’s shock, Ai’s father moved towards us, and with the steady voice filled with dignity he spoke with the first time we met, “Don’t do this.”

—So the father opposes too...?

To be honest, I assumed that the father, who had been cheering Ai on during the match, would stand on our side. I guessed I was hoping too much...

My forehead remained on the tatamis, and I nearly got crushed by despair. What he said next was unexpectedly gentle, “Kuzuryuu-sensei, please lift your head”

Saying that—the father immediately sat in a proper position.^[118]

And then, he continued,

“I too will like to entrust Ai to you.”

“Pa... pa...?”

Ai lifted her head without thinking, staring at her father with red eyes.

And her father, still in a sitting position, stared right at me,

“I won’t regret handing my daughter over to you, sensei. No matter Ai’s future... whether she’ll be able to become a female pro, whether it’s your teachings, or her experiences of fighting with all she has in the shogi world, it’ll definitely become an irreplaceable, precious experience. Today’s match has me strongly believing in this.”

Ai's father put the hands on the tatamis, lowering his head deeply.

"Please take our daughter as your disciple, no matter the talent she has."

Seeing the father lower his head, Ai and I too lowered our heads back.

At that moment, there was an unprecedented shock occurring in the Kansai Shogi Association.

"Ack, another one's kneeling...!"

"Ah... both sides are kneeling...!"

"Double kneeling...!"

In shogi, when both sides play the same formation, there'll be a 'double' added. For example, 'Double Fortress' or 'Double Bear in the Hole', so our situation at this point would also be described as such. Shogi minds...

"Ai."

After this short moment of lowering heads, Ai's father lifted his head slightly, and turned to the back of his petite daughter's head, saying,

"You don't have to keep winning, but you have to be able to say out 'I lost' when you lose."

His tone was harsh, but his expression relaxed, and he continued,

"You don't have to be a pro in the future. Learn shogi, and then be a Meijin in life."

"...Yes!"

Once she heard the strict yet kind lecture from her father, Ai finally reached her hands out to wipe her tears.

"Uu..." "How touching..."

The middle-old aged Kansai shogi players, who really love their sob stories, started tearing up. The staff who had been doubting me before this starting bawling out. I was delighted, sure, but something just felt strange.^[119]

It seemed things were going smoothly... but of course, this wasn't over.

The father agreed, but there was a last boss who hasn't given her permission.

“...Kuzuryuu-sensei.”

“Y-yes!”

This last boss—Ai’s mother, called my name, and I hurriedly sat up. I decided that no matter what she would say next, I would never back down.

Come! Bring on whatever you want to say!!

“Do you have any siblings?”

“...Huh?”

“And also, may I know of your yearly earnings?”

She suddenly asked such a thing. Si-siblings? Yearly earnings?

Ai’s father suddenly questioned his wife agitatedly,

“Hey! Why are you being rude to sensei!?”

“Be quiet, you!”

“Yes.”

The father again knelt down. I knew this would happen.

“We are entrusting our dear daughter to others. It should be expected for us to ask of his family and earnings.”

Should be?

Maybe what she said made sense. She’s definitely worried about the future of her daughter, and that she wanted to be clear on stuff beforehand.

A shogi player’s self-employed, and has to report his taxes, so I had the knowledge of my yearly earnings and various expenses on the back of my hand. Match fees are revealed to the public, so there’s no need to hide.

“There’s 3 of us, one older brother and one young brother. As for earnings, erm, last year was... this much?”

“Hm.”

“And last year, because I got the prize money from the Dragon King Match, probably... about this much?”

“...I see. Understood.”

Once I showed the figures with my hand, Ai’s mother pondered for a while, and then lifted her head, saying— “Kuzuryuu-sensei, if Ai cannot become a female title holder, please marry into the Hinatsurus.”

.....Huh?

For a moment, I did not understand what she meant by that.

What did she say? If Ai can’t get a title, I’ll have to marry her?

Why?

“Oh, marry!” “No, well, even if he’s scum, he’s still the Ryuuou, you know?”
“Engage at 16? That’s the record for the youngest in the shogi world, right?”
“4th Middle School shogi pro in history, youngest Ryuuou, and youngest to get engaged in history...” “I’m really envious to see such various experiences.”

I thoroughly felt the warmth from the Kansai shogi world.

“Erm... eh? Marry? M-me...?”

“Of course. Since you are going to take the sole daughter of the ‘Hinatsurus’ as your disciple, you will have to bear responsibility.”

“Responsibility... so you want me to marry?”

“Our inn is the number one hotel in Japan, beloved by many visitors. It’s the duty of the Hinatsurus to maintain the tradition and quality of the ‘Hinatsuru’... our daughter was not supposed to waste any time bearing such a burden.”

The lady boss of the ‘Hinatsuru’ continued on.

“If she can’t attain a title before graduating from Middle School, she will have to quit shogi even after becoming a female pro. Once she does quit, she will enrol in a high school in Ishikawa Prefecture, and be re-educated thoroughly to become the lady boss of ‘Hinatsuru’. To make up for lost time, I will like to request you to come along to the inn and assist Ai, Kuzuryuu-sensei.”

“Eh!?”

I’m going to work in the inn too?

“So-so this means... I’m to quit my job as a shogi player too!?”

“Of course, you can choose to continue being a pro player, but at the same time, I’ll like to ask of you to learn how to manage the inn, and assist in Ai’s work as her husband.”

“Master! Let’s do our best!!”

Ai’s eyes were dazzling as she grabbed my hand. Mother and daughter, their stubborn personalities are exactly the same.

“He-hey father! Say something here!”

“Let’s do our best together...”

“You don’t look like you’re willing to do your best there!?”

It was clearly the face of one who had lost all hope. I saw my future.

This is bad... really bad...

“I-I can’t! I can’t do it!”

“What you can’t?”

“This means that I have to go to Hokuriku, right? If it’s just me being a Research Group member who has to come to the Association twice a month, then okay, but a player has many other jobs to do other than matches! It’s impossible for me to leave Osaka!! Absolutely impossible!!”

“...Is that so?”

“Hm. It is possible.”

Kuruno-sensei!?

“There are shogi players who live in Niigata and Fukuoka, and with the Hokuriku Shinkansen opened, I don’t think it’ll be too much trouble for a player’s work.”^[120]

“Yes. Elementary school kids can come to Osaka by themselves.”

Even Keika’s saying such words as she stoked the flames. You don’t care about me marrying!?

“You see.”

The lady boss raised her chest proudly, giving a triumphant look.

As for me, I felt like I was buried outside and inside like the Osaka Castle. Ai's mother scowled, giving a grim look as she asked me,

"Kuzuryuu-sensei, are you willing to bet your life on Ai?"

"...Yes."

There's no pretence in that feeling.

Besides, the issue should be settled once I groom Ai into a player capable to getting the title. Even if I couldn't groom her into such a player, I'll definitely regret it if I gave up here.

I sat upright, pacing my breathing as though it's a match.

And, with the resolution to make the first move, to move forward without looking back, I said those words I could not take place.

"Please leave Ai to me!!"

Epilogue

“It’s been a week since Ai returned to Hokuriku... sure is fast.”

Keika and I were drinking coffee after lunch at ‘Twelve’ on the first floor, and she sighed for a long while, saying, “It’s a short while, but I just feel that we’ve been with her for quite a while... there’s a large void in the dojo.”

“...Yeah.”

“You feel lonely, right? ...I guess I don’t need to ask about that.”

“ ...”

I drank my coffee silently, the slightly warm bitterness spread in my mouth.

It’s a little too early till noon, so Keika and I were seated at the U-shaped table. The quiet boss was waiting in the kitchen at the back.

A week after that incident happened—

The ‘Ryuuou Getting On His Knees Incident’ back then quickly spread amongst those involved in shogi. Even Ayumu in Tokyo immediately sent me news of it through LINE on that day. Recent developments in internet and smartphones becoming commonplace meant that there’s practically zero distance between Kanto and Kansai.

The shogi columns on the internet described it in an eerily detail manner, and there was a buzz once it became a headline, a large commotion.

“Everyone, let’s discuss the Ryuuou Yaichi Kuzuryuu, the 4th Middle School shogi player in history, the youngest title holder, and the youngest Master!”

“I heard it’s a nine-year-old girl ← Disciple”

“I heard he said, ‘please leave your daughter to me’ and kneeled down LOLLOLOL Her parents must be shocked.”

“I heard the parents were stunned and brought their daughter back! Of

course!”

“I heard the Kansai players call him the loli king ROFL I’m dying kekekek.”

“Holder of multiple titles... sure is entering his prime there.”

“I heard he has a Research Group for elementary school kids.”

“Why are they researching anyway?”

Those were written by people involved, right? I’ve been wondering if anedeshi was involved the moment the term ‘loli king’ showed up.

“...My father has been grumbling too.”

“Master?”

“Yes. I said, ‘my cute granddaughter went back before I knew it. I’m so lonely.”

Keika placed the finished cup of coffee on the table.

“So my father said that we’re all to live in the same house when Ai comes back today. He said it’s been a while since everyone in the same school lived together.”

“That’s fine. Ai will be happy.”

Ai and her parents went back home to handle the school transfer and moving. On this day, she would officially come to Osaka and begin her training in shogi.

I knew I would be able to meet her soon, but this one week was way too long...

“Is she coming alone? Through train in the day?”

“Yes, alone.”

The moment I took in Ai as my disciple, her parents requested that I ‘be stern in training her’.

“So when Ai comes here, she probably is mentally prepared to not go home if she doesn’t become a title holder. As her master, I intend to train her seriously in every aspect of her life, including shogi. I’m not going to ease up!”

“No different from throwing a cute girl to the wolves, right?”

“But it’s too risky for her to be alone. I thought of fetching her at Osaka station, but she never contacted me.”

“Fetch her... but isn’t it only one station from Osaka station till here (Fukushima)?”

“How naïve! That’s way too naïve, Keika! There’s no way a scout won’t discover such a cute girl walking down the streets of Osaka, right!? What if she wants to join the entertainment circle and lose interest in studying shogi... I have to protect my disciple from such temptations, you know!? I’m her master after all!!”

“...So? You two are going to come over to the Kiyotakis (our house) from Osaka station?”

“You saw how much Ai brought over? Most of her stuff was sent over already. I guess she only has a little bag with her.”

Due to my personal request, we would have Ai’s welcoming party at Master’s house tonight, and everyone in the JS Research Group will come over.

“Oh yes, Yaichi, did you tell Ginko about this? Today’s welcoming party?”

“Eh!? Aren’t you supposed to tell her, Keika!?”

“I didn’t, you know!? It’s the organizer’s responsibility!”

“I-I think she won’t be as angry if you tell her that, Keika...?”

“It’s your disciple’s welcoming party. How can you as the master be so timid?”
I couldn’t argue back since she said so, Uuu....

“Uu... it’s too scary to call... just send a message...”

“No need for the hassle.”

““!!””

“I heard it all.”

“A-anedeshi...”

Anedeshi entered quietly without us noticing, and without looking at the

menu, “Dynamite. C set.” She ordered coolly, and sat beside me.

Keika panicked, and started giving excuses,

“Gi-Ginko? We didn’t force you out on purpose! We-well, there’s some problem trying to contact you, and the organizer’s too undependable—”

“You’re cruel, Keika!! There’s no need for such harsh words there!”

“I still need to prepare food! See you later, okay?”

Keika left money at the counter, and went back alone.

And so, only anedeshi and I were left alone in the shop.

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“...Erm, anedeshi. About today’s welcoming party—”

“Sauce.”^[121]

“Eh?”

“We’re running out of sauce. Remember to replace.”

After saying that, anedeshi didn’t speak up again.

To all who’s unfamiliar with anedeshi, she’s basically saying ‘I’m participating’. She’ll use a lot of sauce, so I had to prepare lots beforehand.

Ginko has always been like this, never being so honest ever since she was 4...when we first started playing shogi together.

Anedeshi agreed to join the party, and I left Twelve as relaxed as wings spread out. She helped me foot the bill, but I didn’t mind at all.

“Speaking of which, I never thought Dynamite was that kind dish...too hard to imagine, even a pro shogi player can’t read into it.”

While feeling relieved that I finally managed to solve the mystery after so many years, my phone vibrated,

“I’m here.”

That one message alone caused me to hasten.

The destination was not stated.

But I had a feeling.

Before I received the message, I already had a feeling that Ai would reunite with me at that place, so I didn’t lock the door.

I went in the direction of the station, down Naniwasuji.

Across the road.

I entered the shopping street, passed by a minimart.

And the moment I opened the door to my apartment—the same words that were said on that day welcomed me.

“Welcome back! Master!”

“...I’m back.”

I gave a bright smile to Ai, who’s carrying a backpack. Let’s leave the strict training for another day.

“Ai Hinatsuru! 4th Grader!”

This girl grew a little as compared to when we first met, and showed a smile livelier than usual. And as before, she said to me, “As promised, please make me your disciple!!”



In Place of an Afterword, here's something about K

When I was in high school, there was a boy in my class who was really strong at shogi, always beaming away. His seat was in front of me, so we had a chance to talk,

I only knew how to move the shogi pieces, and I said, “K, you’re strong at shogi, right? Let’s play a game.”

And then, I took out my selfmade shogi board, (using the magnets that are used during arts class in elementary school, I wrote pieces like ‘pawn’ or ‘King’), and played a match against him.

And I got crushed in an instant.

In the end, K even gave me a ten-piece handicap where he was left with only the ‘King’ and the ‘pawns’, but I lost. To be honest, back then, I felt that we were playing a completely different level of game.

I was a sporty guy in the track team, an active nerd who often accomplished a lot in the prefecture tournaments since first grade. My alma mater would praise any and every club that attained a ranking during the prefecture tournament, and it’s a habit which I really didn’t know whether I should be grateful or disturbed by. Once, K and I stood on the stage. While everyone else was ‘third in the prefecture’ or ‘gold performance prize’, K was awarded this—

“Congratulations on being the ‘Ryuuou’, K!”

There was an instant uproar in the room.

Thinking back, I might have designated the protagonist of this novel as the ‘Dragon King’ because of this real Ryuuou K back in high school.

This ‘Ryuuou’ title K was the high school version, not the pro one or the amateur, the high school only title. It’s like winning a high school tournament,

but only one in the entire country could win this, and it was something big in our prefecture high school that's surrounded by farms.

Just a while back, I had a chance to eat with my senior in high school, someone who read my work.

"Speaking of which, that Dragon King from your year really caused quite a shock..."

Even he was saying such a thing. It seemed the existence of a ryuuou was so impactful to other students, not only me.

But K just kept smiling, and didn't become a different person just because he became the ryuuou. I just didn't want to challenge him to shogi again.

After we graduated from high school, like most other classmates, I lost contact with K, but when I chose shogi as my material and started searching through the results, I often found K's name,

In college, he led the famous Ritsumeikan University twice to the National Championship.^[122]

He also won the Amateur Meijin and Amateur Ryuh title in his spare time, becoming famous as a heavyweight in the amateur circuit.

And because of his fame, he played a few live matches against the computer that are increasingly stronger nowadays.

Shogi Segawa, who went from amateur to pro, wrote a book called 'The Curious Miracle of the Crybaby'^[123], and depicted some hot-blooded scenes I never saw in high school. The more I read it, the more surprised I got.

In High School, there was this shogi manga called 'Shogi Players under the Moon', and I, who barely had some experience of shogi, asked K before,^[124]

"You're not entering the Honorary Group?"

K heard that, and showed the usual smile which was a little different from before.

"I'm too slow at memorizing shogi."

So he answered.

From his smile, I could sense the feeling of someone who had given up. I couldn't bring myself to tell him "You can start challenging from now."

That was the first time I had a peek of how gruelling the world of professional shogi is.

And this part is dedicated to K—the 12th High School Dragon King, Mr Yukio Katou.^[125]

...So, is this casual afterword style satisfactory to all readers?

Thank you, all readers, reading this new series 'The Dragon King is Your Job!'. This is Shirou Shiratori.

This series is my fourth work, and after 'school romcom' → 'fantasy sailboat story' → 'agriculture high school romcom', this is a 'high speed shogi story'. Anyway, it's a work themed around shogi.

Why did I choose shogi as the theme?

About that, my answer's simple. 'I want to write a hot-blooded story'.

I want to show how young people would really put their lives on the line to fight, and the most appropriate theme for this would be the shogi world.

I'm worried if such an idea is properly conveyed to the readers of this book... but I personally feel that I gave my all in this work. I welcome everyone for their feedback and suggestions.

Next, my thanksgiving.

Shirabi-sensei, who's in charge of illustrations, really depicted the characters vividly, carefully acted based on my frivolous feedback and narrations, and even came up with some amazingly delightful creativity that could be seen everywhere, like Ginko's hairclip. I'm really grateful to have Shirabi-sensei's contribution!

The Saiyuki unit in charge of supervision is a unit comprising of young shogi

players in Kansai. I managed to obtain their gracious permission after making such an unreasonable request to the pro players and female pros, while they're busy with their matches and promotional work.^[126]

...This really surprised me. It was unbelievable...

The reason why the setting of this work was chosen as Kansai is because the shogi magazine 'Shogi World' has a serial publication 'Kansai Headquarters Shogi Room 24 Hours' based in the Kansai Shogi Association.

The young players of Kansai appearing in the reports show such kindness yet fiery will, and I really admired such a daily life. In other words, I'm grateful that everyone, whom I derived the characters in the book, is in charge of supervision, yet I'm feeling a little embarrassed...

Everyone in Saiyuki helped decide the match records that appeared in this work, helped point out the mistakes in the work, and even gave lots of precious suggestions on designating the settings and characters. Mr Yuugo Takeuchi even left passionate messages to me, and I feel really gracious as a shogi fan!^[127]

But despite this, this is a work of fiction after all, so it is inevitable that I had to deliberately twist some truths, so I ask of your understanding. I have asked for permission to partially use actual names from the Japanese Shogi Association and other individuals.

Also, I've obtained a lot of help from MyNavi when interviewing them, so I will like to use this opportunity to give my thanks.

The editor-in-charge Ohara, Chief Editor Kitamura who is a huge fan of shogi spent a lot more effort than usual; I suppose there is no other work across the world of light novels that require so much preparation work. I apologize for this, and I will have to continue bother the both of you from now on.

Also, I will like to thank the pro players and the observing reporters for helping to promote this over twitter.

I was really shocked to hear the legend in the shogi world Hifumi Katou mention this world! And I couldn't help but yell "Wow!"

When I attended a soccer match in Gifu, I so happened to encounter Hirotaka

Nozuki-sensei, and not only was I lucky enough to have him sign on the work 'Narikin!', he also uploaded a photo I took of us onto the internet, and I was really gracious. The Consadole Sapporo Nozuki-sensei supports completely crushed the FC Gifu team I was supporting...luckily, I was there to cheer them all! (Narikin is a shogi manga, sensei is the supervisor)

To all the readers who supported me since 'Nourin' or before that, and the Gifu support group who I often met at the stadium, and the Minokamo city that I visited more than my own home, I'm really, really grateful.

To repay every reader's expectations and write a work that exceeds them, I shall continue to impress, so please be lavish in your support!

Next, promotion.

Young Gangan, which has hosted me well for 'Nourin', will begin a manga serialization of this work!

The one in charge of the manga is the pair, scriptwriter 'Kazuki' sensei and illustrator 'Kogetaokoge', please support them!

Also, plans of a drama CD has been decided.

Yaichi's voice actor is Mr Yuuma Uchida, and Ai's voice actress is Miss Rina Hidaka. Current plans are that it will be released in a limited edition with the second volume. If you see this in your local bookstores, please give your utmost support, and also order it!

I'm in charge of the plot of the drama CD, and the title is designated as 'master, the Rook check is here'. It's really something at whim! I hope I wouldn't anger anyone...

The second volume is expected to be released next year!

There'll be **another Ai** showing up in the next volume, and there'll be a fierier match than the first volume. Please look forward to it!!



感想戦

Post Mortem

That day, I entered the shogi room in the Association—and found a maid and a bunny girl playing shogi.

“...What? Stop looking!”

“Ryuuou, good morning.”

The maid lashed out, and the bunny girl nodded at me **elegantly**.

Wearing the maid outfit is the ‘female Jade General’ Ryou Tsukiyomizaka.

It’s said that she’s peerless in speed shogi, and is one of the strongest female players in this era.

Her style focuses on heavy attack and speed, and her personality too is attack-minded. In my mind, she’s one of the top people on the danger ranking, along with anedeshi. She’s based in Kanto, and it was rare that I could encounter her, but whenever we met, I would end up scolded. This ‘super offence archangel’s really scary.

The one dressed in the bunny girl outfit is Machi Kugui, ‘Sakura of the Mountain City’.

The waterfall-like black hair is full of charm, and the white skin is white as snow. She’s a demure beauty from Kyoto, someone who fits the title of ‘Sakura of the Mountain City’.

But her play style is a Bear in the Hole, defences so sturdy that it’s way too violent. She defends her King stronger than anyone, and cuts off all of the opponent’s attack routes and hopes. Looking at how she plays such a vicious style with a smile, she’s not chopped liver. This ‘Torturer Machi’ is really scary.

These two women are playing in maid outfit and bunny suit.

So scary.

“Wh-what’s the matter, both of you? What’s with this getup...?”

I timidly ask, and Tsukiyomizaka (maid outfit) kept staring at the board, saying in contempt, “What else but work? Like anyone is willing to wear this.”

“Are you working part-time at Akihabara or Nihonbashi?”

“What? Who are you calling a scam artist of a maid masseur, you bastard?”

I never said that.

“This is what ‘Pawn Girl’ planned. There’s discussion that if there’s a cosplay training match for a female pro mini-event with the fans, we might be able to attract more visitors?”

“So I suggested that we can wearing bunny girl outfits.”

Kugui (bunny girl) quickly moved her piece, and narrowed her eyes.

“But Ryou said to dress up as a maid. Really, maids are already out of fashion. Right, ryuuou?”

“Enough nonsense, Machi. Why dress up as a bunny girl when we aren’t running a brothel? Isn’t that right, Kuzu?”

“Haa...”

Both of them kept playing shogi as they discussed something weird. Please don’t diver this topic elsewhere.

“We had the female pros do a survey, but there was no result, so we’re going to decide on this through shogi.”

Kugui’s living in Kyoto, and somewhat nearby, but Tsukiyomizaka came all the way here from Tokyo just to decide this? She has a lot of free time.

They’re playing 30 seconds speed shogi, and it’s an intense battle of pieces being slayed one after another. If they played like this on the streets of Akihabara or Nihonbashi, there’ll be an increase in fans, and they might even get a wad of money.

“Where did you get your clothes from? Your own?”

“Impossible!?” “I’ll kill you!”

Both of them lashed out. Scary.

“We borrowed this from the ‘Kobe sensei’. That sense really stored a lot of them.”^[128]

“Ahh...”

“Speaking of which, ryuuou, Master wants you to go over. I heard you got a cute disciple. Master wants you to bring the disciple to him.”

Woah... reached his ears too...?

I didn’t want to bring elementary school kids to that place. To be really honest, I would never bring elementary school kids to such a place, but I was really taken care of by that man while I was learning shogi, and I really couldn’t refuse. Guess I’ll find another time to head over.

While I had such a thought, Tsukiyomizaka stopped in surprise.

“What? You have a disciple?”

“Yes, I have a disciple.”

“...Hmph.”

The female Jade General snorted, read the move till the very last moment, and attacked with the Rook. Watching on, I couldn’t help but gasp. It’s really a bold move.

After the decisive move, Tsukiyomiza lifted her head towards me, probably to rest.

“And then?”

“Then what?”

“What kind of disciple? Show us a photo.”

“Uchideshi, right? Your place is really buzzing now.”

Kugui made her move in an alluring manner, and narrowed her eyes like a fox from Fushimi Inari. That’s real scary.^[129]

“I-I don’t have a photo here.”

“Then explain yourself. A boy or a girl? How old?”

“A nine-year old girl.”

““ ...””

Weird? Why aren't they saying anything now?

“Lol... it's fine, it's the job of a top player to take in disciples... con.”

“You're right. Even if it's a lol...there are many people who want to be disciples of a top player. This is called Give and Take? Use as appropriate... con.”

“You can say whatever you want here, you know?”

““Lolicon.””

“That's not it!!”

Besides, didn't you too join the Research Group at around the same age?

“Have a young girl in your house, and groom her to how you like it... as to be expected of you, ryuuou. How graceful of you.”

‘Torturer Machi’ giggled as she said that, the words sounding really scary. Please don't kill me please don't kill me.

“...Disgusting.”

Tsukiyomizaka moved her chair slightly away from me. This attitude is really depressing.

The match entered a perfect moment, and both sides calmed down.

It's a rare situation for a Bear in the Hole, but both sides had their Kings shielded. Once the Kings on both sides ended in an unwinnable situation (in shogi terms, it's a common saying for ‘there's no way to checkmate the opponent’) both sides stopped in unison.

“...Draw huh?”

“Looks like we can't decide.”

Once it becomes a draw, the rule states that they have to start over, with the one moving second the last time around moving first— “No time to continue moving though...what do we do?”

“Well...”

Both sides kept the pieces, and looked aside me.

Then, they stood up from their chairs, posed (?), and said in unison, ““Which one?””

...What?

“We want to ask what your choice is, ryuuou. Right, Ryou?”

“Yes. This is the job of the witness.”

“Since when did I become the witness!?”

“Stop yapping and choose already. Maids are better, right? Hm?”

“Ryuuou, no need to worry about saying it out. You love bunny girls, don’t you?”

“...”

This is hard...this really is the hardest choice in my life.

Tsukiyomizaka’s maid outfit is really pretty, as to be expected of the archangel, really pretty, showing her long, lanky, model-like body perfectly, and her panties are almost showing.

But Kugui’s bunny girl outfit is as amazing as the idols in the photos... especially the breasts! Especially the breasts!!

“Then... hm..... I choose this.”

What I choose is—the bunny girl.

“Yay! I’m happy, Ryuuou. I love you ≡”

“...Tch.”

Bunny girl jumped around in happiness, and maid gave a disgusted look. Correct decision, if I may say. Once the bunny girl starts to jump, the breasts will start to bounce...

“Anyway, here.”

“Hm? What’s with this bag?”

“No no no, Ryuuou. You don’t understand.”

‘Torturer Machi’ showed a smirk on her lips.

“It’s decided that Ginko will be wearing a bunny girl outfit, you know?”

...Huh?

“Why do you think I came all the way here? It’s to convince that Ginko, you know? Well, with you around, I’m saved~”^[130]

“Yes yes. He may be the younger disciple, but he’s still the Ryuuou!”

“No no no!! That’s absolutely impossible!! There’s no way anedeshi will wear such a thing, right?”

“Isn’t she your girlfriend? It’ll work out somehow.”

“Ryuuou, you privately enjoy having her change into various costumes, right? This older sister here knows?”

“Hell no!! Anyway, it’s too scary to imagine anedeshi being my girlfriend here!!”

Woah! I just had a brief imagination of anedeshi in a maid outfit!
Scaaaarrrry!!!!

“Well anyway, her participation is already decided. We’ll print out a brochure with her photos inside.”

“‘Have a cosplay photo with the Snow White of Naniwa’, that’ll excite people. Yep, that’ll be quite a reaction.”

“Oi, don’t get me involved in your pranks here!?”

“Oh thank goodness thank goodness. Now our burden’s off. I’ll have some Kushikatsu before heading back to Tokyo.”^[131]

Tsukiyomizaka removed her headdress and carelessly it in the front pocket of her apron, still in a maid outfit as she reached her hand for the door knob.

“So we’re leave it you, okay? Make sure she wears it.”

“We’ll leave it to you.”

Kugui put on her Spring coat that closed the front tightly, slipped the bunny ears she was wearing on my head, and followed Tsukiyomizaka out of the shogi

room.

“ ... ”

I, left alone in the room, was at a loss as I held the paper bag of bunny girl costume for anedeshi.

...I guess I should surrender, huh?

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ Ryuuou, the Dragon King, a Promoted Rook in Shogi
2. ↑ In Katakana.
3. ↑ Kuzu can mean Scum.
4. ↑ Yes, if you haven't figured it out, Kuzuryuu is our protagonist's name.
5. ↑ Yes, these are actual magazines.
6. ↑ Anedeshi
means big sister disciple, but of course, if I'm to localize this like I did for Hikaru, the words won't flow as nicely.
7. ↑ Kinsho, 金將, Gold General, Gyoku-Sho, 玉將, Jade General. Combine and you get 金玉, kintama, which means testicles.
8. ↑ In Japanese, filthy is read as obu.
9. ↑ Bear in the Hole, 穴熊, a Castling move to protect the King in the corner of the board.
10. ↑ 81, Yaichi's name, with 8th dan. Combine the numbers, and you'll get a dirty sandwich of a joke.
11. ↑ Means 2 small rooms, a dining room and a kitchen.
12. ↑ Standard recommended opening moves.

13. ↑ Sente, black, the person with the first move, which is Yaichi in this case, and Gote, white, the person with the second move.
14. ↑ The
Hokuriku Line, Thunderbird Limited Express, goes past the Ishikawa Prefecture. Ai's hometown is given as Nanao though, which meant that she
would have to transfer trains at Kanazawa, the capital of Ishikawa. I love having to deal with train rides ever since I started translating the 'Strangled' series...
15. ↑ Basically an opening where both players mirror each other's move, advancing their rook pawn towards the opponent's bishop.
16. ↑ Original
has 'onagai shimasu', and the full traditional greeting before the start of every game should be 'yoroshiku onagai shimasu.
17. ↑ Static
Rook basically means that the rook remains in place, while the pawn before it advances. Ranging Rook basically means that the rook moves to
the center or the left flank for support.
18. ↑ Just to note, this is an opening, and definitely not a ripoff of Kaiba's move against Gozaburo in the YGO anime...
19. ↑ Gyokushou,
玉将, jeweled general. In typical situations, the osho would be the

general used by the higher ranked player, Yaichi in this case, but as you will realize in this segment, both kings are referred to as gyoku.

20. ↑ For

convention sake, the Arabic numeral refers to the horizontal position from right to left, and the English numeral horizontally from top to bottom, from opposite the player, and down.

21. ↑ 盤上没我, a common phrase in shogi.

22. ↑ 将棋とは最後にミスをした方が負けるゲームである

23. ↑ Nori no Tsukudani. Nori, or the Japanese term for edible seaweed. Tsukudani is basically food simmered in soy sauce and mirin.

24. ↑ Ane: older sister

25. ↑ Tsumeshogi,

shogi end game puzzles to checkmate the opponent. Unlike Chess, there's

no such thing as stalemate in shogi given that you can replenish your board, so all problems are considered mates.

26. ↑ Shogizukou, 将棋図巧

27. ↑ 'Naked King', or Naked King, where you literally beat the opponent with just a king: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Um5AyyD2UI>, 'Smoke Mate': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeQgNRA8cYo>

28. ↑

Just a note to all readers, there is a rule unique to shogi called Drop.

Instead of moving a piece, you can use a turn to place one of your captured pieces onto the board. To any reader who wants to challenge this, good luck =P. The moves are drops.

29. ↑ 611 steps. ...kids, just watch the video, though there is somehow one additional piece. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQv4i3tfvCc>

30. ↑ Literally, Shogi Musou, written by Soukan Ito III, the older brother of Kanju Ito.

31. ↑ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7iZQdP7nPOg>

32. ↑ Located in Osaka, the building is also known as Harukas 300, for the 300m height, the tallest skyscraper in Japan.

33. ↑ Cheerful

Central Rook: ゴキゲン中飛車, a formation with the Rook on the Central tile.

Bishop Exchange Fourth File Rook, 角交換四間飛車, also shortened to KKS, is

where the rook moves to the Fourth Tile to the lateral opposite side, fourth tile, while preparing moves to exchange bishops. Both openings are for offenses.

34. ↑ That is, a subsection of the Kyu-Yodo River in Osaka...

35. ↑ 梶子 and 口無し, both read as kuchinashi, with respective meanings.

36. ↑ Junior,

or otoutodeshi, Junior disciple, or in this case, little brother disciple. Too lazy to type out the Japanese title, 6 letters vs 11.

37. ↑ Blood

pool, 血溜まり, or Chidamari (Sketch). In fact, that is the informal name.

The formal name for that would be 音受け, oto-uke, or sound receiver, which

helps to nullify the sound from the shogi board when playing.

38. ↑ Unyielding, 百折不撓, a traditional Chinese idiom adapted into Japanese.

39. ↑ Two pieces handicap, 二枚落ち, with no rook and bishop, bishop handicap, 角落ち, where the bishop is removed instead.

40. ↑ Training

Group Test, 研修会試験, an entrance test for the six training classes. This

particular test is only for female professionals.

41. ↑ 内弟子, live-in student.

42. ↑ Typically,

kakkomari, 仮, means provisional, so like in this case, temp live-in disciple. However, there is an additional furigana to this one word...and refers to the Marriage System in Kancolle.

43. ↑ Sekihan,

steamed sticky rice with red beans, often for special occasions, so much that 'let's have sekihan' can be read as 'let's party!'.

44. ↑ Here

is a dialect term that doesn't translate well. しよっばい, shioppoi, is a

Kanto dialect that means literal saltiness. However, it can also mean 'miserable', 'miserly'. Given the current usage of the word 'salty', I decided to leave it as such.

45. ↑ 一步千金

46. ↑ 飛翔

47. ↑ 混沌

48. ↑ 帝位戦リーグ

49. ↑ Ai can't read the full name.

50. ↑ おんじょうだんのま, Onjoudannnoma. 御上段の間. Yes, these are actual locations inside the place,
https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%B0%86%E6%A3%8B%E4%BC%9A%E9%A4%A8#.E3.83.95.E3.83.AD.E3.82.A2_2 and yes, that is the actual place in Osaka.

51. ↑ The term actual name here, 真名(マナ), is an archaic form.

52. ↑ Kannabe (神鍋), taking both kanji words separately, literally translates as God Cauldron.

53. ↑ Aoyama Tradings: <http://www.aoyama-syouji.co.jp/english/>, Blue Mountain Coffee of Jamaica:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamaican_Blue_Mountain_Coffee

54. ↑ And this Chuu2 can't read it either...

55. ↑ The

Black Academy is a study for the generals and officials. There was one

built in Nijo Castle, but as the text here implies, I can't tell if there's one in Edo Castle.

56. ↑ 人法

地 地法天 天法道, quote from the Laozi, a classical Taoist text. There isn't a

proper translation of this out there, so I thought I should just contribute mine.

57. ↑ As a reminder, lolicon here is the title holder, so he gets the upper seat, while the challenger gets the lower seat.

58. ↑ In

order, the placement order goes as 1. King. Gold generals, silver generals and then knights for both styles. For Ito, the player places 5. the pawns (from left to right), 6. the lances, 7. bishop, 8. and rook. In Ohashi, it's 5. Lances, 6. Bishop, 7. Rook. 8. Pawns (starting from center, and then one left, one right until the board is filled.

59. ↑ Fortress, 矢倉, yagura, a form of castling, and a static rook opening.

60. ↑ Anaguma, Bear in the Hole.

61. ↑ 桂馬の高跳び歩の餌食, a common saying in shogi.

62. ↑ The ka here refers to the kasha, or the lance.

63. ↑ No, I didn't make up the 計画とおりpart. Yes, it's Death Note, but the doori in hiragana instead of the more memetic version...

64. ↑ When

a piece moves to the furthest one-third of the board, it can be promoted at the end of the turn. Unlike real life jobs, promotions here are permanent. In this case, the Dragon Horse is also known as the Promoted Bishop (Ryuuma)

65. ↑ 王の早逃げ八手の得

66. ↑ While

there is a drop rule where both players can play captured pieces, there is a rule called nifu, or double pawns. A pawn cannot be dropped onto a column (vertical) containing another pawn of the same player.

67. ↑ Saint

George and the Dragon. By all accounts, the weapon should have been the

sword Ascalon, so I have no idea as to why a lance is used instead. On a side note, I'm really tempted to continue snarking for the rest of the volume.

68. ↑ That

Super Fast title, yes, it exists. 超速！▲三七銀戦法. It's a common playstyle in

the pro meta during 2010, where the player aims to get the Silver General out as quickly as possible.

69. ↑ Fortress, 矢倉, yagura, a form of castling, and a static rook opening.

70. ↑ Kaishaku, the one to behead someone who commits seppuku.

71. ↑ Remember, the Jade King is shortened as 玉, and can be read as tama.
72. ↑ As a reminder, Black moves first. Prior to this, Ayumu won 3 of his matches in the tournament, lolicon lost all 3.
73. ↑ Fukagawa, a suburb town in Tokyo.
74. ↑ 2ch Meijin site: i2chmeijin.blogg.fc2.com, boujin-kun: shogis.com/s
75. ↑ A very old yonkoma: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sazae-san>
76. ↑ Typo deliberate
77. ↑ The
rook starts on the right, and given that it's the strongest unit, most gameplans involve around capturing it. Choosing the horse on the left is tantamount to 'avoiding' danger, especially for the knight that moves in an unorthodox manner.
78. ↑ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleeve_Rook, 二歩突っ切り定跡
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4utYMMpOdso>
79. ↑ 駒落ち将棋
80. ↑ 銀多伝, Gintaden, where the silver generals are shielded in various directions.
81. ↑ Okonomiyaki sauce.
82. ↑ Katsu means either pork or victory.
83. ↑ JS => elementary school kids.
84. ↑ Again, Mio stuttered.

85. ↑ She speaks slurred Japanese. Naturally, this moe girl is voiced by Yui Ogura in the drama CD.
86. ↑ Imoutodeshi, little sister disciple. I'll keep it as such though.
87. ↑ 京菓子, kyougashi, basically an assortment of Kyoto sweets.
88. ↑ Training
stables, 一門, ichimon, the same term used to describe the groups for training sumos. Tochigi is a prefecture located in Kanto.
89. ↑ Specifically, Shikimaru playing shogi.
90. ↑ 歩切れ → 歩が無くなる事 → 歩無し → ふなっしー . Funashi, the third term, literally means 'run out of moves', and the last one is funasshii.
91. ↑ A mascot for Kumamoto Prefecture...and somehow made into a meme: <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/kumamon>. Just to note, the prior note about Sho-chan was included as part of the actual text, and not a TN by me.
92. ↑ Deliberate misspelling of takoyaki intended.
93. ↑ Slurred as intended.
94. ↑ Yutori
education era, ゆとり世代, or relaxed education era, basically refers to those who're born in the era of relaxed education, introduced to Japanese curriculum in 1977.
95. ↑ USJ, Universal Studios Japan.

96. ↑ This drunk master is channelling his inner Setsuna F. Seiei with the “I am Gundam” Chant.
97. ↑ 珍豚美人, Chintonshan, deep fried pork cutlet.
98. ↑ In alphabets
99. ↑ Just to note, the ‘internets’ part is really listed as plural. One of the gaffes made by George W. Bush Jr.
100. ↑ Seiza, proper sitting, your knees together, butts on ankles, back straight.
101. ↑ This
champion being Yoshiharu Habu, reigning champion of all 7 major titles in 95-96. Ryu-oh, Meijin, Kisei, Oi, Oza, Kioh, Osho.
102. ↑ Just a game is written in English.
103. ↑ Rankings
goes from A1, B1, B2, C1, C2. It’s a different ranking from the dan system, and promotion and relegation between these leagues is dependent
on performances.
104. ↑ e, the lowest ranking. The same ranking as Keika as mentioned before.
105. ↑ Leaving
aside that, there’s a difference in ranking systems. Kyu is for the lower ranks, and Dan for the higher ranks. The Dan rankings used by the kids in Chapter 3 is way different from the ones used here.

- 106. ↑ MyNavi: <https://www.shogi.or.jp/match/mynavi/>
- 107. ↑ 女流名跡[Myoseki], derived from one of the 105 titles in Sumo
- 108. ↑ 女流帝位 [Tei-i]
- 109. ↑ 女流玉將[Gyokushō]
- 110. ↑ In case you're wondering, the women titles are fictitious, except for the 'Queen'.
- 111. ↑ 一丁半
- 112. ↑ 知恵熱, Chienetsu, basically teething fever, as the teeth develop in a baby, the body heat will rise.
- 113. ↑ There's
a furigana attached to it, it's called Kokose (ここせ). It's the opposite of 'wait' in this sense', by playing the big pieces daringly and leaving the king exposed, aiming to checkmate the opponent's king.
- 114. ↑ shogi pieces stand, 駒台, a platform for players to put their captured pieces.
- 115. ↑ Gardenia flowers, 梔子, actually means secret love.
- 116. ↑ Budokai (武道会), and yes, it's a DragonBall shout-out.
- 117. ↑ Meijin, one of the 7 titles in shogi
- 118. ↑ Seiza
- 119. ↑ 浪

花節 , naniwabushi, a narrative singing. Also a slang for sob stories by the younger generation since the stories are almost always sad.

120. ↑ Niigata

Prefecture, located to the East of the mainland Honshu. Fukuoka, located west of Osaka, on Kyushu. The Shinkansen was opened in 1997, by the way.

121. ↑ Okonomiyaki sauce, in case you're wondering.

122. ↑ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ritsumeikan_University

123. ↑ 泣き虫しよったんの奇跡

124. ↑ a shogi manga from Shogakukan from 1993 to 2001

125. ↑ He won Amateur Meijin and Ryuuou titles in 2004-5

126. ↑ Saiyuki, 西遊棋, based in the Kansai Shogi Association. To wit, the name is a pun on Saiyuki, Journey to the West.

127. ↑ <https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E7%AB%B9%E5%86%85%E9%9B%84%E6%82%9F>, 29 years old, became a pro at 25 in 2013.

128. ↑ yes, it's read as sen-se. No, I didn't make a typo in this one. Kyoto dialect.

129. ↑ Fushimi Inari, a Shinto shrine in Kyoto. Has foxes as guardians.

130. ↑ Just to note, the term for 'you' used here is Ome, and not omae, a colloquial.

131. ↑ Kushikatsu, deep fried skewered pork.

Ryuoh no Oshigoto! - Volume 01

The Ryuo's Work is Never Done!

Author: **Shirow Shiratori**

Illustrator: **Shirabi**

Translated by **Teh Ping**
